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Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, A/Claire Lenoir
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CLAIRE LENOIR

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By

VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM

Translated by

ARTHUR SYMONS

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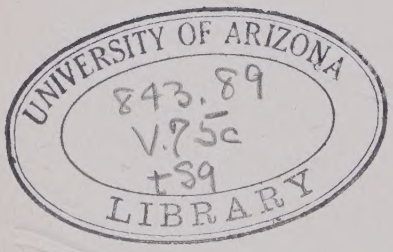

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Memorandum of Doctor Tribulat Bonhomet
Honorary Member of Several Academies
Associate Professor of Physiology
Touching
The Mysterious Case of the Discreet
and Scientific Woman
CLAIRE LENOIR.

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PREFACE

I NEED NOT HERE DILATE ON THE characteristics of Villiers de l'Isle Adam's prose; however, a word should be said as to the reason why I have done these translations. In January, 1889, the year in which Villiers died, he gave me permission to translate any of his stories, not verbally, but by word of mouth to his friend and mine, Remy de Gourmont. After my return from Paris in 1894 I made versions of two of his short stories, which were printed; after that, certain circumstances prevented my carrying out my original intention. Those I have finally brought together were done at long intervals, in various years. I was asked twice to translate *La Révolte* (1870), but I

refused. In that play Villiers for once handled the problem play with his characteristic disdain of mere reality ("As for living," he said, "our servants will do that for us!") but with, for once, a keen sense of it. The play was acted at the Vaudeville on the 6th of May, 1870, and was a complete failure, partly through the "inexperience" (as Villiers afterwards admitted) of a "mute scene," in which the clock strikes every half hour between one and four o'clock in the morning. About quarter of a century later it was revived at the Odéon; and when the curtain fell, and an outcry of applause broke out, the French poet, beside whom I was sitting, said to me: "I was in the theatre the first time it was acted; they shouted just the same then; but then it was to shout down Villiers." But Villiers has said: "What does even Justice matter?"

"The life-blood of rhythmical translation," said Rossetti, "is this commandment —that a good poem shall not be turned into

a bad one. Poetry not being an exact science literality of rendering is altogether secondary to this chief law. I say *literality*—not fidelity, which is by no means the same thing. When literality can be combined with what is thus the primary condition of success, the translator is fortunate, and must strive his utmost to unite them; when such an object can only be attained by paraphrase, that is his only path."

In these translations from Villiers de l'Isle Adam, that is to say Claire Lenoir and some of the "Contes Cruels," I have followed as closely as I could Rossetti's wisdom. Literality is rarely possible in any translation, either from prose or from verse; and certainly not in the case of Villiers; for this man of passionate and lofty genius, who defined Claire Lenoir as *bouffonerie énorme et sombre, colour du siècle,* invented a style which is entirely of his own creation. There is the lacerating laughter of the idealist, there is a Parisian art, sharpened to a fine-

ness of irony such as only wit which is also philosophy can attain; there is satire which becomes tragic, fantastic, macabre. It is part of his curiosity in souls to prefer the complex to the simple, the perverse to the straightforward, the ambiguous to either. And, as he always sets his characters to exhibit themselves at this or that moment of crisis, between two temptations, this casuist of souls will drag forth some horribly stunted or horribly overgrown soul from under its obscure covering, setting it to dance naked before our eyes.

Hotel Vouillemont, Place de la Concorde,
Paris. June 13, 1920.

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INTRODUCTION

VILLIERS DE L'ISLE ADAM

N THE LITERATURE OF THE FANTASTIC there are few higher names than that of the Comte de Villiers de l'Isle Adam—a writer whose singular personality and work render him perhaps the most extraordinary figure in the contemporary world of letters. The descendant of a Breton house of fabulous antiquity, his life has been, like his works, a paradox, and an enigma. He has lived, as he says, somewhere, "par politesse," ceaselessly experimenting upon life, perhaps a little too consciously, with too studied an extravagance of attitude, but at least brilliantly, and with dramatic contrast. An immense consciousness of his own genius, a

pride of race, a contempt, artistic and aristocratic, of the common herd, and, more especially, of the *bourgeois* multitude of letters and of life:—it is to moods of mind like these, permanent with him, that we must look for the source of that violent and *voulu* eccentricity which mars so much of his work, and gives to all of it so disdainful an air. It is unfortunate, I think, when an artist condescends so far as to take notice of the Philistine element in which an impartial Providence has placed him. These good people we have always with us, and I question if any spiritual arms are of avail against them. They are impervious, impalpable; they do not know when they are hit. But to Villiers "les gens de sens commun" are an incessant preoccupation. He is aware of his failure of temper, and writes at the head of a polemical preface, "Genus irritabile vatum." But he does not take the hint, and the common-sense people whom he despises have the satisfaction of

viewing the contortions into which they provoke him.

In considering the work of Villiers we are brought face to face with a writer who seems to be made up of contradictions. Any theory, if it be at all precise, must proceed by making exceptions. Here is a writer who is at once a transcendentalist and a man of the world, a cynic and a believer in the things of the spirit. He is now Swift, now Bernadin de St. Pierre, now Baudelaire or Heine. In reading him you pass from exaltation to buffoonery with the turn of a page, and are never quite sure whether he is speaking seriously or in jest. Above all, everywhere, there is irony; and the irony is of so fine a point, and glances in so many directions, that your judgment is distracted, interrupted, contradicted and confused in a whirlwind of conflicting impressions. And I cannot but be conscious that some things might have to be said differently if it were possible to unearth and

take into consideration those *œuvres de jeunesse* of which the author himself has not a copy.

Villiers has written much; but practically it is little exaggeration to say that he is a man of one book. The volume of "Contes Cruels" (published in 1880) includes, I believe, work of many periods; it contains specimens of every style its author has attempted, and in every kind the best work that he has done. The book as a whole is a masterpiece, and almost every separate tale is a masterpiece. I can think of no other collection of tales in any language on which so various and finely gifted a nature has lavished itself; none with so wide a gamut of feeling, none which is so Protean a manifestation of genius. The "Tales" of Edgar Poe alone surpass it in sheer effect, the "Twice-Told Tales" of Hawthorne alone approach it in variety of delicate sensation; both, compared with its shifting and iridescent play of colours, are but studies in

monochrome. Around this supreme work we may group the other volumes—all more or less imperfect, and at their best but as so many pages the more towards the single masterpiece. "La Revolte," a drama in one act in prose, represented at the Vaudeville May 6, 1870, has something of the touch of certain "Contes Cruels," it is at least not unworthy of a place near them. "L'Eve Future" (1886), that most immense and ferocious of pleasantries, is simply one of the scientific burlesques of the "Contes" swollen out into a huge volume, where it is likely to die of plethora. The volume of the same year, called after its first tale "L'Amour Supreme," attempts to be a second set of "Contes Cruels"; it has nothing of their distinction, except in "Akedysseril," and though striking and clever, is little more than clever and striking. "Tribulat Bonhomet," which appeared in 1887—"une bouffonnerie enorme et sombre, couleur du siècle," as the author has called

it—is largely made up of an "Etude physiologique" published in 1867; like "L'Eve Future," it lacks all sense of proportion—any touch of the restraining hand. In the two later volumes, "Historie Insolites" (1888), and "Nouveaux Contes Cruels" (1889), there are occasional glimpses of the early mastery, as in the fascinating horror of "La Torture par l'Esperance," and the delicate cynicism of "Les Amies de Pension"; on the whole, however, they must be classed with the miscellaneous volume of 1886. As for the prose drama in five acts, "Le Nouveau Monde" (1876), which had the honour of gaining a prize—"une medaille honorifique, une somme de dix mille francs meme, d'autres seductions encore"—there is little in it of the true Villiers; a play with striking effects, no doubt, movement, surprises, a grandiose air; but what would you have of a "prize poem"? It was acted at one of the theatres at Paris in 1882 or 1883, under the auspices of the dilettante Comte

d'Osmoy, and it had a very gratifying "literary" success. Such, omitting the early works, which are absolutely inaccessible, and the numerous volumes of which the titles and no more have been published, are the works we have before us from which to study "peut-etre le seul des hommes de notre generation qui ait eu en leu l'etincelle du genie"—as Catulle Mendes, ever generous in his literary appreciation of friend and foe, has said in that charming book, "La Legende du Parnasse Contemporaine." I shall speak chiefly of the "Contes Cruels," for I believe it is by these that Villiers will live; and I shall try to classify them after a fashion, in order to approach one after another the various sides of this multiform and many-sided genius.

First and before all, Villiers is a humorist, and he is a humorist who has no limitations, who has command of every style, who has essayed every branch of the literature of the fantastic. Frankly, I say this is a pity;

but with such a nature this prodigality—a prodigality which is partly pure unconsciousness, partly sheer bravo—was no doubt inevitable. The consequence has been that we have to lament the comparatively small yield from what is unquestionably, to my way of thinking, the richest vein of ore. There are some half-dozen of tales—all contained in the "Contes Cruels"—which, for certain of the rarest qualities of writing —substleties, delicate perversities, exquisite complexities of irony essentially modern—can be compared, so far as I know, with nothing outside the "Petits Poemes en Prose" of Baudelaire. "Les Demoiselles de Bienfilatre," "Maryelle," "Sentimentalisme," "Le Convive des Dernieres Fêtes," "La Reine Ysabeau"—one might add the solitary poem inserted, jewel amid jewels, amongst the prose—these pieces, with which one or two others have affinities of style though not of temper, constitute a distinct division of M. Villiers' work. They are all,

more or less, studies in modern love, super-subtle and yet perfectly finished little studies, so light in touch, manipulated with so delicate a finesse, so exquisite and unerring a tact, that the most monstrous paradoxes, the most incredible assumptions of cynicism, become possible, become acceptable. Of them all I think the masterpiece is "Les Demoiselles de Bienfilatre"; and it is one of the most perfect little works of art in the world. The mockery of the thing is elemental; cynicism touches its zenith. It becomes tender, it becomes sublime. A perversion simply monstrous appears, in the infantine simplicity of its presentment, touching, credible, heroic. The edge of laughter is skirted by the finest of inches; and, as a last charm, one perceives, through the irony itself—the celestial, the elementary irony—a faint and sweet perfume as of a perverted odour of sanctity. The style has the delicacy of the etcher's needle. From beginning to end every word has been cal-

culated, and every word is an inspiration. No other tale quite equals this supreme achievement; but in "Maryelle," in "Sentimentalisme," and the others, there is the same note, and a perfection often only less absolute. "Maryelle" and "Sentimentalisme" are both studies in a special type of woman, speculations round a certain strange point of fascination; and they render that particular type with the finest precision, and, if I may say so, sympathy. The one may be called a comedy, the other a tragedy. The experiences they record are comic (in the broad sense), certainly, and tragic to the men who undergo them; and in both, under the delicate lightness of the style—the gentle, well-bred, *disengaged* tone of a *raconteur* without reserve or afterthought, or with all that scrupulously hid—there is a sort of double irony, a criss-cross and intertexture of meanings and suggestions, a cynicism which turns, in spite of itself, to poetry, or a poetry which is really

the other side of cynicism. "La Reine Ysabeau" and "Le Convive des Dernieres Fêtes" sound a new note, the note of horror. The former stands almost by itself in the calm cruelty of its style, the singular precision of the manner in which its atrocious complication of love, vengeance, and fatality is unrolled before our eyes—the something enigmatical in the march of the horrible narrative told almost with tenderness. Its serenity is the last refinement of the irony with which this incredible episode arraigns the justice of things. From the parenthesis of the first sentence to the "Priez pour eux," every touch tells, and every touch is a surprise. Very different, and yet in certain points akin to it, is the strange tale of "Le Convive des Dernieres Fêtes," perhaps after the more epic chronicle of "La Reine Ysabeau," the finest of Villiers' tales of enigmatical horror. Quietly as the tale is told, full as it is of complications, and developed through varying episodes, it holds us as the

Ancient Mariner held the wedding guest. It is with a positive physical sensation that we read it, an instinctive shiver of fascinated and terrified suspense. There is something of the same *frisson* in the latter part of "Tribulat Bonhomet," and in the marvellous little study in the supernatural, "L'Intersigne," one of the most impressive of Villiers' works. But here the sensation is not due to effects really out of nature; and the element of horror—distinct and peculiar as is the impression it leaves upon the mind—is but one among the many elements of the piece. In these thirty pages we have a whole romance, definitely outlined characters, all touched with the same *bizarrerie*—the execution-mad Baron, Clio la Cendree, Antoine Chantilly, and Susannah Jackson; the teller of the tale, the vague C . . . , and the fantastic Doctor. Narrow as is the space, it is surcharged with emotion; a word, a look, a smile, a personal taste, is like the touching of an electric button; and, indeed,

it is under the electric light that one fancies these scenes to enact themselves—scenes which have as little in common with mere daylight as their personages with average humanity. It is a world in which the virtues have changed with their names, and coquette with the vices; and in masque and domino one is puzzled to distinguish the one from the other. It is a world of exquisite, delicately depraved beings trembling with sensibility. Irony is their breath of life, paradox their common speech. And the wizard who has raised these ghosts seems to stand aside and regard them with a sarcastic smile.

What is Villiers' view of life? it may occur to us to ask; is he on the side of the angels? That is a question it is premature to answer; we have to look next on another and a widely different aspect of the fantastic edifice of his work.

The group of tales we have been considering reveals the humourist in his capacity of

ironical observer: their wit is a purely impersonal mockery, they deal with life from the point of view of the artist, and they are pre-eminently artistic, free from any direct purpose of pre-occupation. In the pseudo-scientific burlesques, and the kindred satires on ignorant and blatant mediocrity, the smile of the Comic Muse has given place to "Laughter holding both his sides"; absurdity caps absurdity, order and measure seem to be flung to the winds, and in this new Masque of Anarchy sharp blows are given, the jests are barbed, and they fly not quite at random. "L'Esprit du siècle," says Villiers, "ne l'oublions pas, est aux machines." And it is in the mechanical miracles of modern science that he has found a new and unworked and inexhaustible field of satire. Jules Verne has used these new discoveries with admirable skill in his tales of extravagant wonder; Villiers seizes them as a weapon, and in his hands it becomes deadly, and turns back upon the very age which

forged it; as a means of comedy and the comedy becomes soberly Rabelaisian, boisterous and bitter at once, sparing nothing, so that he can develop the deliberate plan of "an apparatus for the chemical analysis of the last sigh," make a sober proposal for the utilization of the sky as a means of advertisement ("Affichage Celeste"), and describe in all its detail and through all its branches the excellent invention of Bathybius Bottom, "La Machine à Gloire," a mechanical contrivance for obtaining dramatic success with the expense and inconvenience of that important institution, the Claque. In these wild and whirling satires, which are at bottom as cold and biting as Swift, we have a quite new variety of style, a style of patchwork and grimaces, a style under which the French language—the language of Bossuet and La Bruyere—almost collapses. Familiar words take new meanings, and flash through all the transformations of the pantomime before our eyes; strange

words start up from forgotten corners; words and thoughts, never brought together since Babel, clash and stumble into a protesting combination; and in the very aspect of the page there is something startling. The absurdity of these things is so extreme, an absurdity so supremely serious, that we are carried almost beyond laughter, and on what is by virtue of its length the most important of the scientific burlesques, "L'Eve Future," it is almost impossible to tell whether the author is really in sober earnest or whether the whole thing is a colossal joke. Its 375 pages are devoted to a painfully elaborate description of the manufacture, under the direction of the "tres-illustre inventeur americain, M. Edison," of an *artificial woman!* No such fundamental satire, such ghastly exposure of "poor humanity," has been conceived since Swift. The sweep of it covers human nature, and its essential laughter breaks over the very elements of man. Unfortunately the book is much too

long; its own weight sinks it; the details become wearisome, the seriousness of the absurdity palls. The writer is no longer an artist, all sense of proportion is gone, and what would have been immortal as a tale of twenty pages is likely to perish, as I said, of plethora in its four hundred.

So far we have had the humourist, a humourist who appears to be cynic to the backbone, cynic equally in the Parisian perversities of "Les Demoiselles de Bienfilatre" and the scientific hilarity of "La Machine à Gloire." But we have now to take account of one of those "exceptions" of which I spoke—work which has nothing of the humourist in it, work in which there is not a trace of cynicism, work full of spirituality and all the virtues. "Virginie et Paul" is an idyl of young love comparable only with that yet lovelier idyl, the magical chapter in "Richard Feverel." This Romeo and Juliet are both fifteen, and their little moment of lovers' chat, full of the poetry of the most

homely and natural things, is brought before us in a manner so exquisitely true, so perfectly felt, that it is not even sentimental. Every word is a note of music, a song of nightingales among the roses—*per amica silentia lunæ*—and there is not a false note in it, no exaggeration, nothing but absolute truth and beauty. The strange and charming little romance of "L'Inconnue" is another of these tales of ingenuous love, full of poetry fresh from lovers' hearts, and with a delicate rhythmical effect in its carefully modulated style. "L'Amour Supreme," a less perfect work of art, exhales the same aroma of tender and etherealized affection—an adoring and almost mystic love of the ideal incarnated in woman. In the bizarre narrative of "Vera," which recalls the supernatural romances of Poe, there is again this strange spirituality of tone; and in the dazzling prose poem of "Akedysseril"—transfigured prose glowing with Eastern colour, a tale of old-world passion full of

barbaric splendour, and touched, for all its remoteness, with the human note—in this epic fragment, considered in France, I believe, to be, in style, at least, Villiers' masterpiece, it is humanity transfigured in the light of the ideal that we contemplate. Humanity transfigured in the light of the ideal! —think for a moment of "Les Demoiselles de Bienfilatre," of "L'Analyse chimique du Dernier Soupir"! What, then, are we to believe? Has Villiers two natures, and can he reconcile irreconcilable opposites? Or if one is the real man, which one? And what of the other? What, in a word, is the true Villiers? "For, as he thinketh in his heart, so is he."

The question is not a difficult one to answer; it depends upon an elementary knowledge of the nature of that perfectly intelligible being, the cynic. The typical cynic is essentially a tender-hearted, sensitive idealist; his cynicism is in the first instance a recoil, then, very often, a disguise. Most

of us come into the world without any very great expectations, not looking for especial loftiness in our neighbours, not very much shocked if every one's devotion to the ideal is not on a level with, perhaps, ours. We go on our way, if not exactly "rejoicing," at least without positive discomfort. Here and there, however, a soul nurtured on dreams and nourished in the scorn of compromise finds its way among men and demands of them perfection. There is no response to the demand. Entranced by an inaccessible ideal, the poor soul finds that its devotion poisons for it all the wells of earth. And this is the birth of what we call a cynic. The cynic's progress is various, and seldom in a straight line. It is significant to find that in the Ibsen-like drama, *La Revolte,* one of Villiers' comparatively early works, the irony has a perfectly serious point, and aims directly at social abuses. The tableau is a scene, an episode, taken straight from life, a piece of the closest ac-

tuality; there is no display, no exaggeration, all is simple and straightforward as truth. The laughter in it is the broken-hearted laughter, sadder than tears, of the poet, the dreamer, before the spectacle of the world. It is obviously the work of one who is a mocker through his very passion for right and good, his sense of the infinite disproportion of things. Less obviously, but indeed quite really, is the enormous and almost aimless mockery of some of these tales of his the reverse of a love of men and a devotion to the good and the beautiful. Cynicism is a quality that develops, and when we find it planted in the brain of a humourist there is simply no accounting for the transformations through which it may run. Thus the gulf which seems to separate "Les Demoiselles de Bienfilatre" from "L'Inconnue" is after all nothing but a series of steps. Nor is it possible for one who judges art as art to regret this series of steps; for it is precisely his cynicism that has become the

"note," the rarest quality, of this otherwise unballasted genius; it is as a cynic that he will live—a cynic who can be pitiless and tender, Rabelaisian and Heinesque, but imaginative, but fantastically poetical, always.*

ARTHUR SYMONS.

* Since these words were written the curtain has fallen, leaving the play unfinished. Villiers de l'Isle Adam died on the 20th of August—prematurely, after all, for he was but fifty, and had so many plans yet to be carried out. Among a number of admirable artists he was one of the few men of genius; he seemed always to be greater than his work, though in what he has left there is achieved an unquestionable greatness. I might say imperishable, for I do not think that ever in this world anything really worth remembering has been forgotten, or that anything worth keeping has perished.

CHAPTER I

PRECAUTIONS AND CONFIDENCES

Touched with pensiveness.
—Thomas de Quincey.

CHAPTER I

PRECAUTIONS AND CONFIDENCES

HE CHAIN OF THESE TENEBROUS events I have decided to relate seeming to me (despite the greyness of my hair and my disdain of vain glory) to contain such insupportable doses of horror that they are certain to trouble many imaginations, even those of lawyers', I must confess that if I ever have these pages printed, I shall have to give way to the desire of my devoted and experienced friends. Only, I fear that, more than once, I felt the sad necessity of attenuating (by the flowers of my style and the resources of a rich vocabulary) their suffocating and unprecedented hideousness.

I do not for one instant believe that Fear should be an universally profitable sensation: for, might it not be a madman's desire to scatter broadcast sensations of the uttermost abomination to all the winds of the world? A profound discovery should not be immediately hurled into the profession of human thoughts. It demands to be rightly digested and seasoned by preparatory minds. Any new discovery, announced without circumspection, might charm, even terrify, certain sympathetic spirits, and over-excite the caustic faculties of scoundrels and reawaken, in the minds of the timorous, the lacerating neurasthenia of Possession.

To make people think is to expose oneself to the scruples of the credulous. So, having weighed this matter in the balance of Reason, I shall speak. Besides, my century reassures me; for certain immature minds that I might reach, there are besides these many strong-minded men I can edify. I

have said "strong-minded men" and I do not speak at random. As for the veracity of my narrative, no one I'm certain, can find in it anything laughable. For, admitting that the following facts are radically wrong, the mere idea of their *simple possibility* is just as terrible as if their authenticity had been demonstrated. When one thinks of it, besides, what might not occur in our mysterious Universe? I have said "mysterious" and not "problematical." All digressions on this subject written hastily would be useless.

All the same, it is needful for my Readers to be persuaded that it is not purely "literary" laurels that intrigue me. In truth, if there is any objective, any non-self, for which I feel a sense of contempt even beyond the expressions allowed to the tongue of a mortal snob, I can say that these are "Belles-Lettres" and their agents!—Ugh!

As I am obliged to present myself before the Public, it seems to me a matter of some

urgency to describe myself, once and for all, morally and physically.

I have lost, in a fruitless fashion, part of my intelligence in asking myself why people who see me for the first time are convulsed with laughter and take on disconcerting attitudes. My aspect—not that I am proud of it—ought I imagine on the contrary to inspire certain thoughts, as, for instance, "He flatters himself because he is only one individual belonging to the human species."

Physically, I am what is called in the scientific vocabulary *"un Saturnien de la seconde époque."* I am tall and thin, and bony; the tormented form of my face shows the disturbances of my nerves; under heavy eyelids shine grey eyes, where shine, in their cavities, Saturn and Mercury, whose cavernous depths reveal penetration. My temples are bare at their summits: this indicates that their dead skin drinks the convictions of others: their provision is made. They are hollowed out at the sides of the

head, like those of mathematicians. Hollow temples, crucibles! They distil ideas into my nose which judges them and pronounces on them. My nose is big—of a considerable dimension—it is a nose both grasping and vaporizing. It is sharply arched in the middle, like one's instep, which, in anyone but myself, would indicate a tendency towards some dark monomania. This is why; the nose is the expression of man's reasoning faculties; it is the organ which precedes, which shines, which announces, which smells and which indicates. The visible nose corresponds to the impalpable nose which everyone bears with himself when he enters the world. If, then, in the shape of a nose, one part becomes bigger—and so imprudently,—to the prejudice of the other parts, it corresponds to some lack of judgment, to some thought one nourishes to the prejudice of the others. The corners of my mouth are pinched and pale like the folds of a shroud. It is placed so near the nose

that it seems to take counsel with it before entering on some light discussion and, according to the proverb, like a crow who throws down nuts.

Without the shape of my chin, which betrays me, I should have been a man of action; but a lunatic and sceptical Saturn made it retreat in the form of a scythe. The colour and the quality of my skin is as hard as those of my symbolically contemporary peers. My ears, finely curved and long like those of the Chinese, notify the minuteness of my mind.

My hand is sterile; the Moon and Mercury dispute its base; the middle finger is knotted, spatulate, charged with wrinkles at the second phalanx. The horizon of my hand is sad and smoky; clouds, pursued by Venus and Apollo, have rarely disturbed its sky; the will of my thumb reposes on a hazardous hill: it is there that Venus indicates her wishes. The palm, only, is that of a hard worker: the fingers can turn back on

themselves, like women's, with a certain coquetry that reveals their perfect education. I am, besides, the only son of the little doctor *Amour BONHOMET,* known for his unlucky adventures in the mines.

Since I have known myself I have always had special clothes made, that are suitable to my person and to my way of walking; that is to say, a large felt hat, with wide borders, like those worn by the Quakers and the Lake Poets; a huge overcoat that I can fling over my shoulder, draped there, as it were, in much the same fashion as the grand phrases that are so habitually in my thought; an old stick with a vermilion handle; a huge diamond ring on my Saturnian finger. I like to be in rivalry with the old men in the romances in regard to the precious fineness and the delicious whiteness of my linen; I have the honour of possessing the exact feet of the King Charlemagne in my Russian Souwaroff boots, which trample the soil I despise; always, wherever I travel, I have

with me my portmanteau, for I wander farther than the wandering Jew. *A moi seul j'ai la physiognomonie de mon siècle, dont j'ai lieu de me croire l'Archétype.* In one word, I am Doctor, philanthropist and man of the world.

My voice is sometimes shrill, sometimes (especially with women) unctuous and deep: always without transition, which ought to please.—Nothing attaches me to Society, neither family nor women of any kind—at least I hope so; all the money that I have is safely invested: I mean the small amount of money that remains to my credit. This is my visiting-card:

Le Docteur
TRIBULAT BONHOMET
Europe.

These are my moral peculiarities. The mysteries of positive science have had, since

the sacred hour when I entered the world, the privilege of invading those faculties of attention of which I am capable, often to the exclusion of every kind of human preoccupation. Thus the infinitely tiny things that swim about in the water, the *Infusorias,* as my master Spallanzani named them, were, from my tender youth, the end and the object of my passionate researches. In order to meet the necessities of my profound studies and of my experiments I have eaten up the enormous inheritance that was left me by my ancestors. Yes, I have consecrated the ripe fruits of their secular sweats in the purchase of lenses and apparatuses which ought to strip naked the arcanas of a world monumentarily invisible!

I have compiled the nomenclatures of all my predecessors. *Non est hic locus* to lay any weight on the discoveries I believe I have added to theirs; posterity will deliver its verdict on this subject, if ever I have any part in posterity. What is important to

notify is that the spirit of analysis, of magnification, of minute examination, is so much the essence of my nature, that for me the joy of life is confined to the exact classification of the weakest tenebrios, to the vision of strange entanglements which are like some very ancient writing that keeps intact the nerves of the insect, in the phenomenon of the foreshortening of horizons, which must remain immense according to the proportions of the retina in which they are reflected. So reality becomes visionary—and I feel that, with the microscope in my hand, I enter as it were on one level into the realms of Dreams.

I am jealous of my discoveries which I do my utmost to conceal. I hate the vulgar and squalid herd as I hate Death; and when anyone questions me on these subjects, *Je fais la Bête.* In fact, I try to pass from an enigma. I can concentrate my delight in the mere imagining of the manner in which I could make people's faces twirl with nerves

if I said what surprising and unexplored mysteries my instruments have shown me. I have said this in passing; I am afraid I have been much too garrulous.

As for religion I have the absurd conviction that God created men and that men created God.

We come from we know not where: the Reason of which is more than dubious. I ought to add, that Death astonishes me more than Reason; it is, really, the bottle thrown at the ink! In it, everything ought necessarily to result, from a mode of logic the opposite of that with which we satisfy ourselves, grumbling in the *decursus vitæ* which is evidently no more than provisional and local.

I don't believe in ghosts, I'm not superstitious. I don't go into the insignificant nonsense of sinister signs, and I don't believe in the frivolous jests of the Dead; I don't like to cross graveyards—and I hate those who exaggerate. I'm no more than a poor old

man, but if Pluto had given me birth on the steps of a throne, and if, just now, one word of mine were sufficient to make a perfect carnage of all the fanatics, I would pronounce it, I feel I should pronounce it, "as if I were peeling a fruit" as the Poet says.

All the same, I am subject to an hereditary evil which consists in an *Apprehension,* a motiveless anxiety, in a word, an abject terror, which seizes me like a crisis, and makes me savour the intolerable bitterness of an infernal and abrupt disquietude. Is it not enough to make one gnash his teeth, when one feels one's soul poisoned, poisoned mortally? I dare not think of it.

Having a cultivated mind, I can really understand almost everything: but—this is singular! I have tried to explain myself to myself, for example, in acoustics—and even in physics, with the help of two sudden currents of heat and cold,—the sound of the wind—well! when I hear the wind howl, I'm afraid; and when Silence trembles be-

fore me I become livid. Whenever a bird's shadow crosses my path, I shiver, oppressed by the weight of a nervous disquietude—which represents to me the pitiable condition of the sky and the earth, of the dead and of the living. So I shout, and when I shout apparitions appear before me: this caravanserai of apparitions that disappear on the instant. Is the Universe idle? Is the devouring Universe—an indefinite chain where the feet of one crack between the jaws of the other—destined to the voracity of some era? What shall become of the worm on the earth? Answer me, sound of the wind, bird that passes—and you who know all things, O Silence!

Such are the inconceivable manias which trouble the lucidity of my ideas: a simple malady of the mind; I am the victim to anxiety. I have treated myself with douches, quinine, purgatives, bitters, tonics and hydrotherapy:—I am ever so much better. I am beginning to reassure myself

and to recognize that Progress is not a dream, that it penetrates the world, illuminates it and, finally, raises us towards chosen spheres, which are alone worthy of the most disciplined outbursts of our intelligence. This is unquestionable, just now, for men of taste.

I still have certain crises; these and my emotions which, in the world of society, I dissimulate in some rout. Having been engaged too long in my conversation with a lady, at a given moment, she knows nothing of it—no, luckily, I see that in her eyes!—She does not know that at the exact instant when I make some innocent sweet melt in my mouth, at the exact instant when I treat the others around me as "fanatics"—she ignores, that—at this exact moment—a certain midnight shakes within me its rusty, profound, lugubrious tolling! *And that this midnight sounds more than twelve strokes!*

Now, for several years, I have invented a mania, which amuses me in the intervals of

my serious work; which, as a matter of fact, makes it easier for me to mix in various societies, and to confabulate with men, women and children and to be a welcome guest. So, to escape from myself and from these evil fancies of mine, the mania I have referred to is my mania for *Making Marriages*.

My reason for adopting this mania is extremely simple: it is derived from my admiration of Voltaire's genius, the creator of Micromégas (an immortal page) where many of my immortal discoveries are foreseen. My admiration of this precious writer is not servile; everyone must seek, in fact, to develop himself by himself, with a profound contempt for one's masters and for these authors who, having elevated him, have endeavoured to inculcate in them their own ideas. What I admire in Voltaire is this ability one finds in Pozzo di Borgo and in Machiavelli—my best-loved authors—which consists in trampling under foot all

respect of his equal under the appearances of an almost obsequious devotion. Perfect appearances whose supreme term would be to really render one service! I recommend this manner of understanding charity; it is the only one which is serious: it serves to hide its real occupations. Now, I do not mind if everyone knows that I abandon myself, body and soul, to my *Infusorias.* Visits, questions, compliments, consultations would have prevented me from concentrating myself on my vertiginous discoveries. Besides, as *I must speak*, when I am in society, I try to speak to everyone of what is nearest to his heart—so as to avoid all questions as to the nature of my scientific investigations; which is almost always the marriage of so and so which preoccupies the most laughable of the children of Woman. That stands to reason! And that is why, without one atom of imagination, I have glided into the intimacy of so many people, and why I have made—miraculously helped

by Hazard—such a quantity of marriages.

Most of these marriages that were accomplished under my auspices have been favoured by Heaven, in spite of which, many times, in my hate, I have married, as they say, one foot in the air, exactly the wrong couple;—finally, however, all comes right in the end: always. Only once have I failed! And it is on the astonishing couple I riveted together in this union that my narrative is based.

Need I affirm that this dismal failure on my part which turned their hymen (to use the Latin equivalent)—into a definite, a nameless crisis—resulted in my most capital discovery? I would be an ingrate before Destiny if I had the impudence of thinking of it for one second! Science, veritable Science is inaccessible to Pity. Where should we be without that? So—even were this the question of my eternal damnation—and of a terror which seizes me as I write, a nameless terror—I, Tribulat Bonhomet,

doctor, professor of diagnosis, have come to the point of doubting my own existence—to the point of doubting things much more certain, even now, to my vision—I maintain and I shall always maintain my admiration of Voltaire! Nor shall I ever repent of what I have done! I am as utterly indifferent as anyone might be who has severed certain erratic histories with a catastrophic dash. And I pride myself on being, still, one of the strangest souls that have ever escaped from the hands of the Most High God. All men who are really modern, who are in "the modern movement," will understand me.

I shall limit myself to a rapid exposition of the facts, as they present themselves and are by themselves classified. Let him commentate this narrative who will, I shall not overload it with any scientific theories: thus the general impression will all depend on the Reader's intelligence.

CHAPTER II

SIR HENRY CLIFTON

The city represented the earth, with its sorrows and its graves left behind, yet not out of sight, nor wholly forgotten.

Confessions of an Opium Smoker.

—Thomas de Quincey.

CHAPTER II

SIR HENRY CLIFTON

N JULY 1866 AT THE END OF A banquet we had given in honour of the Captain of an English brig, the *Wonderful,* on our way to Brittany, I began to talk over our coffee with Sir Henry Clifton, the ship's officer; a man of reserved manners, perhaps about thirty. That night, as I said, we fell into conversation, for between a ship's officer and a simple passenger our relations had been cordial since the beginning of our voyage. We had come from the coast of Ireland and, plunged in the study of my dear Infusorias, I had remained, for the greater part of the time, under deck, experimenting on the sea's brine. We had been speaking of our arrival

next day at Saint Malo; then, the fumes of the wine and the lights in the cabin having troubled our senses, we went up to the main deck to breathe the air of the night, where we lighted our cigars. I had been careful during the banquet to avoid any reference to the discussion on politics which had become so animated between the courses: this kind of discussion never seemed to me interesting except with women. Indeed, who would be insensible to their smiles, to their gracious and lively emotions, to their understanding air, to their troubled eyes that can become penetrating, surprised, disquieted? Certainly the discussions of politics with women captures us and makes us dream of their beauty.

In order to merit their esteem and confidence my face becomes more paternal, more benevolent, more tender than usual! I give out gravely, with lowered eyes, the most revolting absurdities, they only pardon on account of my white hair: so much so,

that in spite of this, my words seem to enchant them.

For the rest, political conversation ought to be as amusing with the stronger sex if these only knew how to bring to it that grace and that sense of enjoyment which are so desirable; for I have never known anyone foresee anything serious in the matter of events. Clifton himself had never moved his lips; which gave me a high opinion of him: nothing at his age seeming to me more difficult than silence. Politically, I presumed, he ought to share my ideas, and I can notify them thus: Let there be for every country, for every citizen, worthy of this name, between his work and his meals, about three hours of leisure day by day. In this case he could fill up these moments of respite in little conversations, digestive and innocent, on the affairs of his country. Or, if nothing in the least "grave" or remarkable were to happen, how could he begin his discussion? He would be literally

bored, for there would be nothing at all left for his entertainment: the worries of citizens are almost always fatal to the Heads of States. The arm is ready to function when the tongue is idle, and, as he has to somehow get through his precipitate three hours, the talker of one day becomes the agitator of the next. That is the sad secret of Revolutions.

It seems to me that every good Government ought to stir up, as much as possible, wars, epidemics, fears, hopes, events of all kinds (good or bad, that doesn't matter), things, finally, capable of enlivening the light little innocent and digestive conversations of every citizen.

After twenty, thirty, forty years of a perpetual *qui-vive!* the Kings have diverted our attention: they have reigned peacefully, amusing themselves and everyone has been contented. This, according to me, is one of the chief definitions of the high diplomacy: to occupy their citizen's minds, at whatever cost, in order to divert attention from one-

self, when one has had the honour of receiving the mission of governing men from the hands of God. Machiavelli—my best loved author—never found a clearer formula than that. One may imagine then my indifference for the events, the political crisis and the complications of the European Cabinets: I leave the interest of the controversies which they arouse to men exhausted by their inborn thirst of losing their time.

I privately praised Sir Henry Clifton for his reserve and for his silent manner of drinking: he was in fact rather tipsy, he possessed a complimentary colour, and I saw that the chapter of experiences was approaching.

I kept all my self-possession and I spied on my victim. The night was covered with stars. The North-East wind freshened and drove us onward: the red lantern on the quarter-deck shone on the white foam that followed in our wake. It was the hurrahs

coming from the punch-party of the officers below that came to us, between decks, mixed with the immense sounds of the sea.

Seeing him silent, I feared some question from him as to the manner of my life and—perhaps of my labours. I began the conversation according to my irresistible methods: "My dear young friend, I have studied you very carefully since we have been on board this ship, can I be of any use to you?"

(Just then, I lowered my voice as I gazed at nothing like a man who speaks to himself.) "Perhaps you have been dreaming of some wonderful woman, some fascinating adventuress who has a fortune of her own, some Arabian Night's mystery. That's the word." (I lifted my eyelids and gazed on him sideways.) "Am I right or am I wrong?"

After a certain stupor he answered, as he flicked the ashes of his cigar: "How malign you are! The devil take me if I know what you mean."

I put my hand on his shoulder, I whispered in his ear: "A presentation, without an instant's hesitation, next Monday afternoon—and you will be married in six weeks. Hang me if you think I'm mistaken!"

He seized my hands in astonishment: the poison had bitten him: I had evaded scientific questions. "I seem to understand that you want to propose to me something like——"

He stopped, as if he were shamefaced.

I said: "A legitimate union — a woman——"

"A woman!" he cried, agitated by nervous shivers.

"Why not?" I went on, flaring a mystery; "for your mastery of the sea is well known, and why not your mastery of women? You have the way of making sailors' knots, and why not women's knots?—that is, why not help them in knotting up their tresses?"

There was a moment's silence; after an instant's reflection he recoiled from me, as

if I had stung him. Then, changing his tone, he said: "I thank you; only, as it is certain we shall never meet again, the fact is, that I must refuse your advice and that there is a woman I shall never forget as long as I live."

What was diabolical in me was that I utterly ignored what woman I could think of recommending to him; and besides this, my principal preoccupation was to avert any question relative to my Infusoria.

"And she's married!" said Clifton to himself.

So not knowing how, in my stupefaction, I could answer him, I said: "That's a pity." There was a moment—a most singular moment of silence, during which I was aware he was observing me. He seemed to me to be wondering, just then, whether he meant to embrace me or to hit me: he did neither. "Thanks, dear friend," he finally articulated in a tone of violent anguish: "The poor woman must never see me again, never

again," he added with bitterness. "She's perhaps blind, this very moment when I speak of her. O, her poor, poor eyes!" And as he said this his hands went nervously up to his forehead, as if he were intoxicated. At these words, I took my cigar out of my mouth—and I cast in the shadow a horrible side-long glance in his direction: for—I don't really know why—he made me think of my strange friend, of the miserable *eyes* of Madame Claire Lenoir.

I silently took out my watch and got up. "Until I see you next," I said to him, "you have your secrets: there are moments when one *ought to prefer* solitude and I know how to respect them." He shook my hand without lifting his head. I buttoned up my overcoat on account of the wind, I went down to my cabin, abandoning Sir Henry Clifton to his reveries, under the special inspiration and protection of the night, of Constantin wine and of the sea.

CHAPTER III

SUPEROGATORY EXPLANATIONS

"Ce quit voit, en nos yeux, veille et se cache en deçà du fond de nos prunelles d'argile."

—Lysiane de D'Aubelleyne.

CHAPTER III

SUPEROGATORY EXPLANATIONS

JUMPED INTO BED, AND AS I SWUNG with my hammock, I remembered I was going to stay with the Lenoirs, for a fortnight at least: that they expected me, as I had sent them a letter from Jersey.

Had I seen them since their wedding, which was more than three years ago? No, I had not. I was quite aware I had made a stupid mistake in their marriage: it happened that, when I was staying at Luchon in the Pyrenees, during one of my illnesses, I became acquainted with Claire's family. An upright and hospitable family of merchants, if there ever were such. Their only daughter, who was just on twenty, had a

seductive beauty: she had chestnut hair, a fair face; her complexion had the whiteness of jade and had sometimes an almost luminous transparence. The frontal bone was unfortunately rather large and indicated a cerebral capacity, useless and even harmful in a woman. Her eyes were pale green. Her passion for climbing the mountains and the rocks had exposed her eyes—her great eyes!—to the sandy and hot wind that comes from the South. Her eyesight, that was naturally weak, had become much worse, so that the unanimous verdict of the oculists was that she was threatened with premature blindness. But, as I thought of the likeness of the names of the Lenoirs of Luchon and that of my old friend the doctor Césaire Lenoir, of Saint-Malo, it occurred to me that Claire might make an excellent match for Césaire. I wrote to him on the instant; he came in haste from Luchon. This coincidence of the name was skilfully exploited by me as the pretext of a personal presenta-

tion. Césaire was then about forty-two years; they were soon married: I certainly imagined I had made both of them happy. Lenoir took his wife to Saint-Malo; they lived in la rue des Mauvaises-Pâleurs, 18, in the outskirts of the town; in his letters he spoke of their happiness—and of the menace of Claire's blindness—as if otherwise their lives were untroubled.

How could Sir Henry Clifton, the naval officer, have made her acquaintance? It seemed certain to me he had spoken of her. Then the suspicion arose: had he hinted at Claire's dishonour? This hideous thought revolted me. I was a visionary—at least I had that supposition. Besides, Claire, unless my memory of her were somehow confused, was learned, an impossible creature, a dreamer, a phrase-maker, a fault-finder; and, as I mused over the question of her possible adultery—I fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTERIOUS SHORT ARTICLE

D'ailleurs, en ce temps léthargique,
Sans gaieté comme sans remords,
Le seul rire encore logique
Est celui des têtes de morts.

—Paul Verlaine.

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTERIOUS SHORT ARTICLE

WHEN I AWOKE WE WERE IN THE HARbour of Saint-Malo; it was eleven o'clock, the sun shone; I took my cane and my portmanteau, I jumped on to the gangway, and with the other travellers I found myself on the wharf, my boots stained with the sea's foam. The first thing I did, as I trod on the soil of my illustrious country, was to enter a café—from which I saw the shore and the tomb of Chateaubriand, whose ethnographical books on the Savages are, it seems, remarkable. I had my usual dose of absinthe, which is enormous; with a kind of nostalgia I took up a local newspaper that lay on the table—a local paper, dirty, torn, dated I know not how long ago. And now, when I think

of it, I remember distinctly that the waiter wanted to take it out of my hands in order to give me one that was more recent—and that I resisted him with the mechanical movement of a man from whom one wants to seize what he holds.

As I turned over the pages I saw a short article inserted between a case of intrusion on the part of the Clergy and some recent recipe, which ran:

> "L'Académie des Sciences de Paris has stated the authenticity of certain surprising facts. It can be asserted that the animals destined to our nourishment—such as sheep, lambs, horses and cats, conserve in their eyes, after the butcher's death stroke, the impression of the objects they have seen before they die. It is a photograph of pavements, stalls, gutters, of vague figures, among which one almost always distinguishes that of the man who has slaughtered them; this endures till their decomposition. As one sees, our ignorance in this matter ought to be lessened by so curious a discovery."

This sensorial depravation might have been due to the nervous fatigue, morally and

physically, caused by my sea-voyage: I began to examine myself: then mechanically, I raised my eyes—I suddenly saw a man who stood against a foresail, two hundred yards from me: it was Clifton. Our eyes met, then with a kind of distaste he turned the other way. Why? Neither of us will ever know.

To cut short these horrid thoughts I jumped up, I drank what remained of the absinthe; then, turning my back on the tavern, I walked rapidly in the direction of the Lenoirs' house under the burning heat of the sun. I stopped, from time to time, to wipe the sweat off my forehead and to cast disquieting glances around me.

CHAPTER V

THE BLUE-COLOURED SPECTACLES

Beaux yeux de mon enfant, arcanes adorés,
Vous ressemblez beaucoup à ces grottes magiques,
Où, derrière l'amas des ombres léthargiques,
Scintillent vaguement des trésors ignorés.
—Charles Baudelaire: *Spleen et Idéal.*

CHAPTER V

THE BLUE-COLOURED SPECTACLES

N ABOUT HALF AN HOUR I FOUND myself before the isolated house of Doctor Césaire Lenoir. I say "doctor" just as a way of speaking: Lenoir was literally a beaten ass and a brindled goose, if ever there were such under the sun. I rang the bell: an old man-servant opened the door, followed by a huge basset-hound with reddish hair, whose double function was to serve as watch-dog and to strangle Mr. Rat. The servant showed me into the dining-room and asked me to wait there. It was the ordinary dining-room on the first floor: a scent of trees came through the open window that gave on a garden; there was a shaded lamp on the table, the portrait of an ancestor on the

wall; on the chimney piece a deep and liquid mirror, framed in sculptured oak, reflected the old Dresden Clock and the ancient candelabra. The room was penetrated with a provincial quietude which added to its isolation. I stood there, my hat and my cane in one hand, my portmanteau in the other. I felt uneasy; the room for all I knew might have been full of echoes. I turned and found myself face to face with the mirror; I saw in it the door that opened noiselessly behind me, and in the doorway a woman whose aspect added to my sense of uneasiness. She wore a dressing-gown of green velvet; two long locks of brown hair fell, à la Sevigné on her breast; * she had over her eyes immense gold-rimmed spectacles, whose huge centres almost hid her eyelids. She came, showing her teeth with a mechanical smile, as if she were an appari-

* It may be useless to remind the Reader that we are not responsible for even the physical *fashions of Sceir* of Tribulat Bonhommet. He has his own appreciations, which we have no intention of rectifying.

tion. I have said it and I shall say it again: the sudden sight of her filled me with apprehension.

"So it is you," said Claire in a voice as biting and vibrating as metal. "We have been expecting you. Drink a glass of old Madeira, Césaire will be here in an instant."

"You!" said I as I seized her hands: "Is it possible?"

She gazed at me with an air of surprise. "Of course," said she. "I really didn't know I am so awfully changed. Ah! You mean these spectacles." Then, lifting them, she showed me her eyes. They were of an inner brilliance so vitrous that they had the coldness of stone: they hurt one: they were sea-green.

"Lower them," I said, "a sudden draught of air might be dangerous." Her heavy eyelids half closed over her eyes. She replaced them, saying: "I don't know what's the matter with these eyes of mine; they wink so rapidly that it is as much for the in-

terest of others as well as mine that I have to wear them."

There was a silence. It seemed to me at that moment that I ought to invent a madrigal, so imperiously did the situation require it. But, the moment when I opened my mouth in order to utter some symbolical comparison with the most shining stars of the heavenly vault (loved by the nocturnal angels), another personage appeared behind the glass door: it was Lenoir. No sooner had he recognized me than his raised and separated eyebrows having been smoothed out, he entered like a cannon-ball without one word, with a frank expansion which nearly knocked me over. He stifled me.

"Here I am!" I said to him. "I am delighted, my dear Lenoir, to see that the years haven't seriously altered you. Always so strong, so vigorous!" I added, with a forced smile, feeling myself all over so as to assure myself that nothing was broken in my armour.

He called for the servants—I noticed that he breathed heavily—while his wife poured out for me a glass of Madeira; he told them to take the few things I had brought with me to the spare room in which I was to sleep. After that, we went into the drawing-room and began to talk.

CHAPTER VI

I KILL TIME BEFORE DINNER

Tu te tairas, O voix sinistre des vivants!
—Leconte de Lisle.

CHAPTER VI

I KILL TIME BEFORE DINNER

THE ROOM WE WERE IN WAS DECORATED in sombre colours. There were alabaster vases on the chimney-piece; in the shadow, a picture in the style of the pupils of Rubens; there were withered violet dahlias in a glass, on the piano. A little war-vessel made by Lenoir, with its cannons and its equipments, was suspended from the ceiling in the form of a lustre. The open window gave us a view of the sea. There, seated in an armchair between Césaire and Claire, I began to relate the wonders of my wanderings—over the five quarters of the world—and of my explorations both on the mountains and in the earth's entrails; of the muddy vol-

canoes I had seen, of the pointed skulls of the Seminoles, of the cults of Juggernaut, of the atrocious Chinese punishments, of the African Sorcerers who dance naked, of the passport tattooed on my back that had been given me, as a sign of affection by Zouozoué —Anandezoué—Rakastapakoué — Boué— Anazonopati — Abdoulrakem — Panauntogorno, King of the Honolulu Islands; of the Indian trees on which Buddha's words are inscribed; of the cult of the serpent among the savages of the Land of Fire (a serpent who contents himself with biting human shadows on the sands, in the sunset —to make them die), of the hemlock of the Western Pole, whose infusion gives always the same hallucinations and contains the antediluvian's world's reflections: of the niums-niums or men who have monkey's tails and are classed with the gorilla; of the grand Lama of Thibet, whose royal visage is covered from birth to death inclusively; of the chief of the Heathen tribe, Koti-

Ko-ki, whose life is given up to levying on his subjects huge morsels of flesh when he passes by their huts; I spoke of the big trees, the rocks, the floods, and of other adventures. I held the Dice, I played balls, I agitated the fool's bauble, I narrated with self-assurance all these absurdities; I talked to right and to left, and up and down, thinking that after all, that was good enough for them. In short, I was charming.

No sooner had I finished my narrative than, as it seemed to me, both of them were utterly stupefied; in fact, they looked at me as if they had never known me. I pitied these provincial people, and, besides, Lenoir had infuriated me; for one thing because he had embraced me with too much tenderness and with too much vigour: I don't like these gross expansions. The night became darker; the sunset's colours shone on our faces with a whiter light, as we sat in the red room. After we had been for some time silent, the old man-servant opened the

door, and said: "Madame, the dinner is served."

We rose, I stiffened my legs, I smiled amiably, I rounded my arm, which Madame Lenoir condescended to take. Césaire followed us furtively thrusting snuff up his nose. His meditative attitude had not escaped me, in spite of the fact that he was behind me, and because all people who have tact ought to guess what goes on behind them.

The servants brought in lighted candelabras, whose gleam shone on the glasses, the table-cloth and the prisms. We sat down; we undid our serviettes, with a certain silent solemnity due to the atmosphere of our conversation, and, after the first glass of Bordeaux, there was a general smile.

CHAPTER VII

WE DISCUSS MUSIC AND LITERATURE

Un dîner bien caqueté.
—Madame de Sevigné.

CHAPTER VII

WE DISCUSS MUSIC AND LITERATURE

DURING THE DINNER CLAIRE BEGAN TO speak of Music with a science I never could have believed possible in so miserable a woman. She referred to a certain famous German Musician, whose name I've forgotten—was it not Wagner? and to the Epoch. She spoke of his "miraculous genius" accessible only to the Initiated. His operas deal with Brabant Legends—with the boat of *The Flying Dutchman*—with a villainous warrior seduced by Venus—who is revered at Paphos—with one called *The Perfect Fool*—with a mythological rigmarole in four sittings; these latter compositions filled Claire Lenoir with an inexplicable admiration. I remem-

ber the way in which she spoke of a certain *crescendoen rê un* in which spoke (said she in her childish enthusiasm) the "terrible Hosanna." She specified, besides, I know not what *Pilgrims' Song,* "there was something eternal in its profound lassitude." This song captivated her to the point of divagation. If one were to believe her, "he was—Parsifal—stifled beneath the entanglements of aphrodisiac laughter, incited by mocking sirens appearing under the moonlight, among the reeds." All this took place "near an enchanted mountain." That signified the caressing instigations of some of our most obscure passions, in us the earth's pilgrims, and with this the memory of the lands we have never seen;—a thought that no undertaker's man—as one imagines—could ever conceive of—stupid as it might have been! "But," she went on, "the mystical fanfare ended by bursting and dominating triumphantly: a reflective and decisive ecstasy wove together, in the twilight, the

hymn of glory and of martyrdom, precipitating the flight of the Shadows like an authentic mission of Hope!"

At this announcement, I felt rise in my throat a mad desire of laughing. It was evident she had abused her frivolous sex's privileges so as to divert herself at my expense. I judged it opportune to leave things as they were, so these eulogies kept up the chatter of our conversation during the first two courses.

When she started on the subject of Literature, I began to listen: for in the Chincha Islands—not far from Peru, which are famous for their manure, the warm dung of the wild birds, which was exported on sailing-ships, some of which landed at Antwerp—during an illness, which is useless to remember, I had with me various volumes to distract my sleepless nights. Several of these were the works of a prodigious writer who had made his fame and fortune: which is, for myself and for others who are inca-

pable of feeding themselves on words, the best recommendation. He was prolific, and, in the five quarters of the world, the elect of both the sexes were always in dispute over his productions, such as they were. I've forgotten his name! but his particular kind of talent—in which he excelled all other novelists—consisted in his manner of gliding, as snakes do, over the most scabrous situations. He struck one's imagination by his creations of abnormal adventures—so logical and so horrible! where certain of his heroes (who often belong to the lowest classes) die on one page and are revived on the next. On these pages, which one reads feverishly, were simultaneously projected the revered shades of Orpheus, Homer, Virgil and Dante—if not of Chapelain—and, if I may say so—this man, this moralist, represents the *pure expression of modern Art in its Renaissance and its maturity*. In this sense he satisfied our taste. As for myself, after this epoch of my exile in the Chinchas, I re-

turned hastily so as to set a furtive and uncertain foot on French soil, and to devote myself entirely to the study of his latest collections, to find the public leaves unencumbered by his genius, only offering me here and there a few trifles from his strong and authorized pen.

I had almost forgotten to say that I had also taken with me two or three volumes written by a former French deputy, ex-peer of France,— if I may believe what the Captain wildly affirmed to me—and the works of an American novelist printed at Richmond, in South Carolina.

Now, as a matter of fact the prose of the moralist of the Chinchas Islands had, really, refreshed my heart. His characters, solid as wood, had excited and interested me, they had often made me feel emotional—notably one of them named, I believe, *Rocambole,* written by Ponson du Terrail, a pornographical novelist. I have only one reproach to bring against him, with a certain

reserve, with a certain humility: that is to say, that he is sometimes, perhaps, a little—metaphysical, a little—how shall I say?—a little too abstract:—finally, the last thing that occurs to me—a little too much in *the clouds*: the residence, unluckily for them, of all the Poets.

Eh! When shall there come a writer who shall tell us of real things, of the things we know by heart, of the things whose naked truth can be expressed only in the terms of Eternity! And, finally, things absolutely *serious!* The writer, in one word, who shall be worthy of the Public esteem, ought to be its Public Pen.

As for the former deputy (can it have been Victor Hugo?) his "verses," according to his astonishing expression, had warmed my bile. These were (as far as I can remember them) a kind of pot-pourri of endless legends, and, as one says, without rhyme or reason. He mixed up in his verses Mahomet, Adam and Eve, the Sultan, Swiss

regiments and wandering knights: it was, in fact, the most chaotic cepharnaën that a burning brain has ever conceived in its total extravagance.

Certain fine words scattered here and there over his pages—certain just appreciations, only render them, in my eyes, more than ever dangerous to those who have little understanding. I can't imagine why the title of depravity should have been conferred on such an individual: this collection of his verses, somehow or other, had given me an almost pitiful idea of our beautiful French language.

As for the American, this jovial rascal seemed to be possessed by several demons: he might have made a pact with the Devil, one of the forms of Lucifer. In spite of this, I have read all his stories, and one thing that struck me was the way in which he invented the titles of his book: such as *Histories sans pareilles* and *Contes extraordinaries,* which made me wonder why he

himself found his prose so extraordinary. In fact his prose had a curious way of giving me, in the Chinchas Islands, delicious slumbers.

Claire blushed when I mentioned the name of the moralist and admitted with some confusion that she had never heard of him. I shot at her sideways a viperine glance. I returned to the question of the American (it is astonishing how such names as his escape me!) and as I referred to these *Contes sans pareilles* she shivered as if she had just awakened out of sleep. As for the expression of her face, in the name of the Demons the American novelist invoked, it was indefinable. Claire fixed on me her green eyes, under the shade of her spectacles, and remained in a vague stupor. Then she filled her glass with water, drank it, and, without any motive, burst into a fit of unmusical laughter. I considered her with a painful pity, as I interrogated myself as to her mental faculties. Then I heard her

murmur: "Why need we laugh? It is written: 'The dead shall never praise you.'"

"Yes, it is the mysterious law!" she went on, in a low voice, "and there are beings so strangely constituted that in the midst of floods of light they are inevitably obscure. These are profane souls, garbed in mere hazards and appearances, that pass, immured, into the sepulchre of their mortal senses."

I blamed her for this epigram evidently addressed to her husband. She continued: "There are other beings who know the ways of life and are curious of the ways that lead to death. These, for whom the Kingdom of the Spirit ought to come, disdain the years, being possessors of the Eternal. In the depth of their sacred eyes shines a light more precious than millions of sensible universes. And the world, in its unconscious obedience to God's Laws, has done literally nothing save in being just to itself and in devoting itself to *Death,* since the day when

there was cried on the heights of heaven 'Woe be to those who dream!' "

And she murmured the words (insane, it seemed to me) of Lactantius, in his *De Morte persecutorum*—in so low a voice that I divined more than I heard: *Pulcher hymnus Dei homo immortalis!* Then she remained, her chin in the palm of her hand, as if she had forgotten our presence.

The compliment was certainly exaggerated: as a matter of fact, I haven't really so good a soul as she may have supposed: so I poured out a glass of Château Margaux, and after that felt more compassion for her futile rigmarole.

"Madam," I replied, "I have always shared sentiments such as yours in regard to those who seemed to me unworthy of them: therefore temperamentally I can render service, in an almost *unconscious* fashion, as you said, to certain people."

"Really?" said she.

"Yes, really. It has often happened to me

to make the acquaintance of talented young men, who are full of life and laughter, expansive and jolly. Ah, these poets, these sweet children! How useful I might have been to them!"

"And then?" said Claire.

"And then," said I, "I don't know how that happened, but the fact is that the more they came to know me, the more insensibly they lost their habit of laughter—*and even of smiling.*"

No sooner had I uttered these words than Claire shivered—with her nervous shiver—which stupid people call *La petite Mort.* Lenoir lifted his head and with a bizarre seriousness looked at me; then, without one word, went on eating.

"To conclude," I said, "dear Madame Lenoir, I have always loved good authors—and as certainly as the poet's bauble is to modern children no other thing than the atrophied tiara of Melchissedeck—so cer-

tainly the Moralist of the Chinchas Islands is one of these."

Claire silently lowered her head. I saw that her ignorance had overwhelmed her; and, delighted with her blush, I turned to Césaire with the intention of discussing things more serious than fine Literature and Music.

CHAPTER VIII

OCCULTISM

Dans les dîners d'hommes, il y a une tendance à parler de l'immortalité de l'âme au dessert.

—Edmond and Jules de Goncourt.

CHAPTER VIII

OCCULTISM

AS CÉSAIRE'S INTELLECT AND EVEN HIS soul's faculties seemed to me for the moment absorbed with a plate of savoury collops and as the sensation of taste ought certainly to stifle in him (as I presumed) whatever sense remained in him of divine and human justice, I judged it prudent to let the storm pass over—and even to amuse myself with the stoicism of his conduct. Claire, suddenly, in the midst of our silence, complained of the too vivid light of the candles. So it was under the lamplight, that Césaire, satiated, threw himself back in his chair, put both his hands noisily on the table where the servant had put the coffee and the liqueurs, and out of

his savage and satisfied eyes gazed on Claire and on myself in a kind of dizziness. Then he savoured the scent of the Moka, put down his glass, and let fall this word in his guttural voice: "Perfect!" Then he began, suddenly, a philosophical discussion. The thesis chosen by our host was no more than this: "Shall we be called to new chains of existence or is this life itself definitive? Will the immensity of our actions and of our thoughts create for us a new being that is dissolved in Death?" In other words: "As for our daily necessities, shall these, immediately after the dissolution of the organism, after the disintegration of the actual form, return into the Immodifiable?"

I saw with terror that his intention was to pour out before me all the superstitions that have infected men's imaginations. Lenoir was a man who haunted solitary places, a man of sombre systems, of a vindictive temperament. Fundamentally there was in him something primitive and exasperated.

He pretended, as he laughed under his huge nose, that he had within him a *hairy Vampire*. But when he started on his favourite theme: *the form that the nervous fluid of dead people might assume, the physical and temporary power of their ancestors on the living*—his eyes shone with superstitious flames. This savage spoke with terror of the Devil of all the Hells, and he might have ended by disquieting temperaments less balanced than his, thanks to his bizarre and obstinate eloquence.

Once he kept me awake from night till morning with a certain relation of the captain of a Russian vessel, who had been made a prisoner by the islanders of the Southern Archipelago—a horrid narrative! and during those hours his face wore so terrible an expression that an unlimited *ferocity,* a defalcation made of his degree of civilization, seemed to me to have been always part of his flesh and blood.

As for what he called his theological

ideas, they were for me subjects of mere mockery—but, faithful to the prescriptions of those excellent writers I have often quoted it didn't occur to me to blame him openly. Lenoir never doubted that, when I openly approved of his somnolent and futile theories, that *in petto* I nourished against them a base, disdainful, blind and bloody hate! Was it for that reason that I had helped in marrying him, and without one atom of pity? For I have always a motive in doing what I have to do, and—like the Jupiter of Aeschylus—I alone know my own thoughts.

Now, it was somewhere about this year, that, as I heard from some of his friends, his belief in the doctrines of Magic, of Occultism, and of Magnetism and of Hypnotism, had attained their maximum of intensity. The suggestions that he made in cold blood were enough to make one's flesh creep, in all the monstrousness of the expression.

He delighted in Eliphas Lévi, in Raymond Lully, Mesmer and Guillaume Portel, the strange monk of the Black Magic. He quoted the prose of the astrological Abbé Thrithème. He swore only by Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastes, called the "divine" Paracelsus.. Gaffarel and the popular Swedenborg ravished him to the point of delirium, and he pretended that the Hell of Purgation, analysed by Reynaud, was more than reasonable. The moderns, Mirville, Crookes, Kardek, plunged him into deep surmises. He believed in *Les Russucités d'Irlande,* in the Slavic Vampires, in the evil eye; he quoted passages taken from the fifth volume of the mystical books of Görres, in support of his propositions. What was most stupendous in Lenoir was that he was a mad Hegelian. He would say: "Can one find an atom of good sense in people's contradictions who are stupid enough to think for themselves? That leads to nothing, since no one is ever convinced of himself!"

In regard to Magnetism, he was attracted to the curious experiments of Dupotet and of Reggazzoni; and, as a matter of fact, I agreed with them. The old wretch believed absolutely in blows struck on someone from a distance, in passions ardently excited by the magnetiser's will, in artificial riches, in the agonies of a miscarriage, in poisoned flowers, and finally in the signs of the sacerdotal Exorcism formulating reprobation. He had in his room the Pentagram of virgin gold and all the attributes proper to the evocations of Black Magic. He conceived that the Baphometic bull was an emblem given to the Knights Templars; he could comment learnedly on Solomon's clavicules and he believed that all of us are in possession of a sidereal being. And, in support of these paradoxes, he quoted texts which—surprisingly enough—seemed to be quite rational, quite logical, quite scientific and quite irrefutable; but that, evidently, might be in reality no more than a series of absurd

jests, fruit of ignorance and of charlatanism.

Such was the doctor; it was he who had posed the question—if ever there were such a question—that I have mentioned. It resulted in so astonishing and so surprising a discussion, that it is indispensable to my narrative, for it leads to even stranger events that are to follow.

CHAPTER IX

BLUNDERS, INDISCRETIONS AND STUPIDITIES (INCREDIBLE!) OF MY POOR FRIEND

Philosophy commands and never obeys.
—ARISTOTLE.

CHAPTER IX

BLUNDERS, INDISCRETIONS AND STUPIDITIES (INCREDIBLE!) OF MY POOR FRIEND

E LIGHTED OUR CIGARS AND WENT into the drawing-room; and, so as to give us a better view of the floods that shone, far off, through the open window, Claire lowered the shade of the lamp. The sky was a dark chaos of horrible clouds; a copper-coloured crescent moon and a few stars: these were our night aspects.

"We are in a theatre: they are giving us, to-night, a great opera *La Mer,* God's music," sighed Claire.

"The fact is," I replied, "that, if I dare express myself, the Sea is going to give a divine bass to the harmony of our thoughts."

I flung myself on the sofa: Claire put her elbows on the balcony, looking sideways on the waves; Lenoir, in his arm-chair, in front of me, plunged his singularly clear and brilliant eyes on mine, with a terrible fixity. "My friend," said I, "I want, first of all, your assistance on a point of philosophy that intrigues me."

"Speak, Bonhomet, speak!" murmured Lenoir, evidently flattered by what I had said.

"Here it is in two words, the physicians, who live in mad-houses, have they ever thought of dosing, in approximate measures, the degree of *reality* in the hallucinations of their madmen?"

"Before I answer you," said he with no emotion, "I want to know what you mean by this word: *Reality*?"

"That which I see, that which I feel, that which I touch," said I, smiling with pity.

"No," said Lenoir, "you know that man is condemned, by the fatal insufficiency of

his organism, to a perpetual error. Any microscope is enough to prove that our senses deceive us and that we *can't see things as they are.* Is there not always grandeur and poetry in nature? But, if we were once to consider it under its veritable aspect, where everything devours everything, it is probable that we should shiver more with horror than with enthusiasm."

"So be it," said I, "we're aware of that. Only the real for us is relative."

"Then," replied Lenoir, "if the real is decidedly what we see, what we have seen, I can't explain to myself why a madman's hallucinations don't merit the name of realities."

I felt embarrassed: but I am not easily so, in spite of the fear that possesses me.

"That is my real faith, my dear Lenoir," said I to him. I added with mock humility: "The best thing for us to do is to fall on our knees before our Creator, without trying to fathom the inexplicable mystery of things."

"That depends," said Lenoir.

"How, that depends?"

"I ask no more than to fall on my knees before my Creator, on the one condition that it must be before Him that I fall on my knees and not before the idea that I make of Him. I do not ask more than to adore God, but I've no desire, in my turn, to adore myself under that name."

"But your conscience?" cried I.

"If my conscience has betrayed me once (as I have just perceived through my senses) who supposes they won't betray me again? When I thank God, I project my spirit before me as far as possible, endeavouring to infuse into it all the virtues of my human conscience, that I try vainly to eternalize; but this is nothing more than the spirit that's in me, and not God. There's no escape for myself: that's the secret of Narcissus. All I want to be certain of is that it is really God of whom I think when I pray."

"Sophisms!" said I. "One calls objectivity, I believe, something that resides in the brain. But one doesn't create one's own self."

"You said?" queried Lenoir in his irritating manner.

"I suppose you won't deny that God created us?" I queried.

"Listen: God? Mystery? The Creation? Another mystery. To say that God created us is to affirm that we are derived from mystery; a point on which we are perfectly in accord, since it's just simply this mystery (or, this problem) that one has to discover and that you only make more obscure in personifying it. Now, every problem supposes its solution. I'm not far from believing that *to-day* the solution might be possible."

"Possible! Good gracious!" I cried, "and with our limited mind?"

"Limited in what sense?" said Claire.

"Can you define any limit, when all our limitations belong to the *Next World*?"

Such a woman's question was enough to alarm people much more prudish than I am.

"Where do you find 'limits' in the Spirit?" said Lenoir. "I am willing to prove that man's understanding must discover, in and by itself, the strict necessity of its reason of being, the *Law* that gives an *appearance* to things and to the principle of all reality. I don't speak except from the point of view of this world (reserving the question whether there is another) of what my senses do not reveal to me."

"But," I said to him, "a mere Christian would ask you why Humanity should have waited for 6000 centuries up to your time, before you had known the Truth? Yours, that is, if you have it."

"I should answer him: Humanity has certainly waited for 5000 years before knowing yours! Truth isn't measured by the

year. As for me, surely I must be myself, before I become a Christian? Before being a Christian, I must be man. First of all, I am man: I make a part of the human series; and when I lift myself by thought to the human Spirit, I cease to be a particular myself: I speak in the name of the species I represent. Outside the general idea, I would be no more than a madman having the hallucination of the sky and of the earth, driven onward at all hazards, as the others are, in view of some base interest in 'practical' life."

I judged that this was the right moment to bring back Lenoir to a sense of his humility. "Let me simply quote Cabanis," I said. And I exposed to them the passage where the physician relates examples of people bitten by mad animals: wolves, dogs, swine and bulls. " 'These people,' said he, 'hide themselves under the furniture, bark, howl, foam, bellow and imitate, by their attitudes, the customs and the instincts of the

animal that has bitten them.' You understand," I added, "that the most perfect man of genius ought never to lose sight of the fact that such disasters might easily fall on him, and before the mere possibility of this humiliation, it is with an extreme reserve—and after a mature examination from the general point of view—that one ought to expose his personal experiences. As for me, Kant, Schopenhauer, Fichte and Schelling are writers literally infected with a kind of *virus rabique*. Hegel, you were going to quote him (since he is your master), yields to them in nothing. When, after Theology, the Devil, in answer to: *Quis ut Deus*? of Michael, hurled: *Non serviam!* (a stupidity that was chastised by the celestial Virtues) he warned us to be careful of any undue precipitation. And the were-wolf Nabuchodonosor didn't enforce point by point this symbolical lesson given to our pride! Hegel gives one the effect of being the Nabuchodonosor of Philosophy." With

that I flashed on Lenoir the facets of my diamonds. As he heard this (may I not call it?) gibberish, he opened his eyes in an outrageous manner, and I wondered how he was going to answer me.

"You don't pretend to infer, I suppose," he murmured, "that some malady might be our limit, since Space survives the individual. If Cabanis is bitten, the Human Spirit will never cease raging."

"What do you call the soul? I conclude that the soul is no more than a secretion of the brain, a little essential phosphorus, and that the ideal is a malady of the organization, nothing more."

Lenoir laughed and said: "So the problem resolves itself into knowing what is 'phosphorus' and what 'secretes itself' in the brain, the Sun, the sense of examination, the reflection of the Universe in our thought, and whence comes the necessity of the existence of these 'secretions' rather than of their annihilation? That's what I want to know:

from the moment there's a question of it, the rest leaves me indifferent. Between the physiologists and the metaphysicians the dissension comes only from the diversity of expressions: Science has its lands and its languages, as the Earth has. But when you suppose you can harm the faculties of the soul, you are wrong. You might as well say, if you cut off a man's legs: 'I defy you to walk!' Nothing more."

"Splendidly eloquent," said I, in a confused manner, as if I had not known by heart these lamentable banalities. "What are your conclusions?"

"I conclude that the Spirit makes the beginning and the end of the Universe. In the tree's germ, in the plant's grain, one can't say that the tree and the plant are contained in but little space: they have their roots in the earth's soil. The future plant and tree, virtual in their germs, are obscurely thought there. By the mediatory idea of exteriority, which is as it were the web on which is

woven the eternal future of Cosmos, *The Idea* denies itself, so as to prove its own existence under the form of Nature, and I can reconstruct the fact by employing the Hegelian dialect. The Idea grows only in finding itself in its own negation. The movement contained in the growth of trees and in the blades of grass, is it not the same as that which makes scintillate the suns that project their rings across the skies and produce in this manner other suns? As the fruits fallen from the tree or the blades of grass produce other plants and other trees, as the wind carries across prairies and valleys the vegetable seed, so the centrifugal rapidity disperses the astral seed in the abysses: this is the world's germination, that Hegel—as you know—regarded as 'a plant that grows.' "

CHAPTER X

A PHILOSOPHICAL CONFUSION

La notte che le cose ci nasconde.

—DANTE.

CHAPTER X

A PHILOSOPHICAL CONFUSION

THE SERVANT BROUGHT US TEA. Claire, whose eye-glasses gave her a sinister aspect, offered me a cup of a warm Chinese infusion, with the addition of Kirsch.

"Lenoir," said I as I savoured this liqueur, "you are in contradiction, I must warn you, with the theologians and physiologists, in affirming that Idea and Matter are the same thing."

"No."

"No?"

"Haven't the theologians invented the theory that God is a pure spirit, and that He has created the world? Matter can therefore emanate from the Spirit, according to certain theologians. Thus the difference is only apparent. As for the physiologists, are

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they not forced to admit that the *form* of the body itself is more *essential* to him than his matter?"

I didn't agree with him; I inwardly objected to his arguments. "Come," said I, "why abuse yourself in your rights as a host to the point of insinuating that this *bit of Firewood,* for instance, isn't matter?"

"Where do you see Matter in this bit of Firewood?"

I put my hands over my face: the shipwreck of this intelligence made me feel really ill. He wanted to jest with me.

"You pretend that you don't see matter?" said I to him with stupor: "and that this *Bit of Firewood*——"

"Is elementary!" cried Lenoir, whom my apparent ignorance had exasperated. "I see the attributes of form, of colour, of polarity, of weight, reunited: I call *wood,* a certain aggregate of these qualities. But that which sustains these qualities—*substances,* finally—that these attributes cover

with their veil, where is it? Between your eyelids, and nowhere else! You see that 'Matter' in itself is not sensible, that it doesn't penetrate, and that 'substance' is a being purely intellectual of which the sensible world is no more than a negative form."

"But, what is an intellectual being, which is the reality of an idea, of a pure idea, before the evident reality of the fact of this simple *Bit of Firewood* whose identity you deny!"

"I have only to throw this log into the fire to efface it: there vanishes your *Bit of Firewood,* it has become another than itself. What is this but an equal reality, which effaces itself, which is and which is not? Can one call that reality? No. It is the Future, it is the Possible—it is not the Real; for that *might be* just as well as it *might not be.* Reality is quite another thing than this contingency, and so we have returned again, logically, to the question we first discussed: 'What is *Reality*?' "

"On my part," said I, perturbed by the doctor's paradoxes, "I sustain, on the contrary, that what is solid and heavy is no more than—what the devil?—a simple idea."

"Bring back the idea of *weight* (since that astonishes you) into the idea of *length,* for instance, and you'll understand that much better."

"In the words, that's possible; but material facts don't lend themselves to these fusions and confusions as easily as ideas."

"You are jesting, are you not?" said Lenoir. "How do you suppose that the fact could deceive a logical idea, since the logical idea is the essence of the fact?"

"Prove it—try to explain the theory."

"It is enough to me to make a weight slide on the whole length of a steel bar so that the length of the bar might lift weights a thousand times greater than that of the weights that slide along this bar. You see that the length and the weight return one into the other in the same way as an idea."

"Phraseology," I grumbled: "that's specious. But really these are only words."

"And how the devil do you suppose I'm going to answer you?" shouted Lenoir. "You denied the value of the *word* with the *word* itself. Do you suppose your gestures mean anything? The wind breathes, the instinct howls, the idea expresses itself."

"My dear Lenoir," I cried, "let's return to the question. I can only conclude in avowing that, as I neither touch nor see ideals, I prefer to call sensible things real things. Surely all humanity ought to be on my side."

"No," said Lenoir.

"NO?" queried I for the third time, as I gazed sadly on this Hegelian.

"If things are, if the apparent Reality of the Universe *produces* itself, that can only be by virtue of an absolute Necessity. There is a reason for that: well, whether this Reason be the Idea or something else than the Idea, it is rather of the sensitive being that

one should doubt, since all the reality I possess necessarily comes to it from this *raison-vive,* from that creative Law, and that this reason, this law, can only be seized and penetrated by Spirit. The Idea is therefore the highest form of Reality; and it is Reality itself, because it participates in the nature of the super-eternal laws, and penetrates the elements of things. From whence it follows that in studying simply the filiations of the Idea, I shall study the consecutive laws of things, and my reasoning will *coincide,* if it be strict, with the absolute Essence of things, because it must imply this NECESSITY that lies at the bottom of all things. In a word I am, in so far as thought can be concerned, the mirror, the REFLEXION, of universal law, or, according to the expression of the theologians, 'I am made in the image of God!' To understand, is the reflection of creation."

I looked at Claire who seemed to hear with profound attention the astonishing

theories of her pitiful husband: I pitied her for having chosen the wrong man. "Eh! Your God isn't the God of the Theologians," said I.

"That's not the question," replied Lenoir. "I speak, in this moment, Philosophy: but, only believing in the Black Sciences, I do not attribute more than a dubious importance—and in a word of *relative* one—to the principles I sustain in this moment. This settled, one must see what your Theologians say of God. 'God,' said Malebranche, 'is the abode of spirits as space is the abode of bodies.' *'Dieu'* said Saint Augustine, *'est tout entier partout, contenu tout entier nulle part.'* 'Who could deny that God is a body, besides being a spirit?' said Tertullian 'God is the pure Act,' said Saint Thomas. 'God is the All powerful Father!' said the Nicene Creed. I should never stop talking, if I were to give all the so-called definitions of the Inconditional-Being, the notion of whom is inseparable from the being. But

the Spirit of the World cannot be defined in this manner. 'Only these lights and these images are deep': The word of Jacob Boehm, 'God is the eternal silence,' doesn't convince me, and I'm sure that it is in the effort to refrain from one's second thoughts —so as to fathom desperately the obscure side of it,—that the Abbé Clarke never pronounced the name of God without extreme physical demonstrations of Terror and of Respect. On my own part, I really don't know if the God my spirit has conscience of, differs essentially in its notion from that of the Doctors of the Church: I know only one thing—that is to say that I have an abject *fear* of this absolute Lover of Justice."

I couldn't help laughing at this confession. "Fear nothing, Lenoir," said I, "and certainly not on this subject. Don't exaggerate anything—or we might knock against Common-sense."

"That's true. Let us incline before this divine Common-sense, that changes opin-

ion century by century, and whose propensity is to hate from birth, everything, even to the name of the Soul. Fortunately the Spirit takes no more heed of the insult to Common-sense than the Shepherd of the groans of the herds that he directs towards the tranquil resting-place of Death or of Sleep." Here Lenoir closed his eyes, as if lost in a vision. "O, Torches!" he murmured, "What shall be, after all, your glory, without the Power of Darkness? Yet, there are pestilential Darknesses that, incapable of receiving the Light, shall extinguish the torches."

At this word, I avow it, at this banal pleasantry—the idea of the possible loss of my friend seemed to me less painful.

"In fact," I said to him, "in what positive and practical region could these speculations prove in any sense useful?"

Lenoir gazed at me for some instants, gravely, and without answering me.

CHAPTER XI

THE DOCTOR, CLAIRE LENOIR AND MYSELF ARE SEIZED BY AN ACCESS OF JOVIALITY

Tin tin sonando con si dolce nota

—DANTE.

CHAPTER XI

THE DOCTOR, CLAIRE LENOIR AND MYSELF ARE SEIZED BY AN ACCESS OF JOVIALITY

HANKS TO MY EVASIONS LENOIR—who had shown all the ingenuity of his intelligence—had only, on the other hand, made more conspicuous his lack of skill in regard to these transcendental matters. I had evidently directed him along a road where, despite all his efforts, I could from this time forward, and at my leisure, dig for his illusions a definite ditch.

He sat, his hand on his forehead, wondering what more enormous monstrosity he could invent; his meditative silence proved to me, beyond all measures, his soul's vacuity; for, had he had something to say, he would have said it, immediately, like all

the world, without experiencing this futile need of reflecting, which is the distinct sign of impotence and of defeat.

"I won't hide from you," I cried, "my conviction of the vanity of your arguments on the utilitarian side of your bizarre theories. Now, what could all this serve for?"

He opened his eyes and said: "For you and for your equals, that won't serve. For others, disdainful of Death and filled with an ardent desire of Eternity, that serves in fighting gloriously in the cause of justice, with the certainty of the defeat."

At these words I could not control a slight cry of terror and my face expressed so abject an apprehension that Lenoir remained speechless. I had felt, in effect, with an almost divine foresight, that he was going to count the interminable chaplet of his subversive social ideas. Without this instinctive movement of disapproval, he would have gone on commenting his theories on

the world's independence and would have lulled himself asleep with the chimeras of his proper voice. I saw that, simply, my pantomime had made a clear sweep of his resolutions. Of what weight, in effect, might have been, in the eyes of a serious man, these great gruesome phrases, when they might simply have been reflected by my brain and dissected by my lips, so that—despoiled of all vain flourishes—they might have turned into a dryness capable of provoking in the spectres themselves the nostalgia of the sarcophagus?

"Yes," I said, "I understand you: it is a question of the People. Do you expect to make them accessible to certain dreams of liberty, of dignity and of justice? There are things irremediable that one makes worse than ever in the attempt at curing them. The People? Certainly, no one admires them more than I; but, as my function is to complain of them, theirs is to suffer. If it were averred that Science were good to

them, who of us—myself to begin with!—wouldn't give his soul, his life and his love for the People? Unluckily the victim, once his links unfastened, has no other ideal than that of falling on the neck of his liberator—for the abode of these miserable beings cannot remain vacant in this world, and we can't ransom one except in taking his place, happy enough if one didn't pay by ruin, calumny and death for the benefits we have conferred on him. Gratitude weighs heavily on us, and the progress of Lights only instills in creatures formerly unconscious, inoffensive and who enjoyed our pity, the instincts of jealousy, of abject hatred, of envy and of treason! Be sure, Lenoir, that I am competent in these matters. Also I say: Let the Benefactors perish if their action is to have for result the dispersal of their victims. I cast Maledictions on the future Republics, on the social ideals, for, as in the French Revolution, blood was shed on all the streets in Paris and on the sham-

bles, so our own blood may be shed in the next Revolution."

This fashion of hideous jesting cast some gaiety over the Lenoirs: of course they imagined I had been lying. Charmed with their error, I thought it advisable to speculate on their sensations. Had they known me better than they did, I'm certain they would have been grossly mistaken. I have remarked, in effect, a bizarre thing, which being one of my specialties, always intrigues me: the fact that my fooleries have made people turn pale.

I filled the room with one of those bursts of laughter which, repeated by the nocturnal echoes, used to make—if I remember rightly—dogs howl. Since then I have had to modify my way of laughing, for the truth is that my hilarity terrifies me. I generally make use of these abominable manifestations in times of danger, and when I am alone and afraid, knowing that my fear might be contagious: this assures my safety

in the presence of thieves and murderers, when I am in infamous places. My laughter has put to flight, better than prayers, absolute phantoms; and, as for myself, I have never been able to contemplate the Starry Skies!—only the Spirits who dwell in the ghastly stars do I invoke for my own protection.

All the same, I wasn't long in perceiving that what I had taken for a smile on Claire's face was simply an effect of shadow—that the lamp had projected on it. I had to realize also that Lenoir had induced me into an error by a certain nervous trick—accompanied by a bad cough that I had taken for a fit of laughter; it was the result of the smoke of his cigar. And I understood—then—that I had been the only boon companion of the three, in my access of gaiety.

CHAPTER XII

A SENTIMENTAL WOMAN'S DISCUSSION

And Satan: "Whither hast thou led me, Adam?"
—MILTON.

CHAPTER XII

A SENTIMENTAL WOMAN'S DISCUSSION

WE FILLED OUR CUPS OF TEA, AND between two teaspoons of Kirsch, I said: "Lenoir, instead of living here at home, without any ambition, without any particular speculations, what reason have you for being so preoccupied with all these questions—questions in the air? We'll never discover *le fin mot* of all that!"

I said Lenoir was a maniac: perhaps a maniac of philosophy: but, as a matter of fact, I couldn't have imagined for a moment that he was going to make one great leap into the midst of our discussion, which dispelled some of its tedium.

"Ah, but!" cried he, "it seems to me that

we have our own part in that, as you said, in spite of ourselves: yet it appears we might discover *le fin mot!* For one thing: the dialetic of Nature is the same as that in our brain: her works are her ideas: 'The tree grows by syllogism,' said Hegel. Things are thoughts clothed with various exteriorities, and Nature produces as we who think. As soon as we discover the relations of a phenomenon with our magic, we class it, we pronounce on it that single word: Science; and, from this moment, we are its masters. It is therefore permitted to us to rely a little on the value of our Reason—even in what touches the supreme solution of the riddle of the Universe. Why not? As for—GOD! Let us go straight on and act as if—Someone understood us—and as if we must never die. That's what I call one's fight for justice."

Claire, at these words, murmured in the obscure corner where she sat: "My friend, the definition of such a destiny isn't nearly

clear enough to explain the idea we have of ourselves; and when I said just now that 'the Spirit of Man was unlimited,' I meant to add to it 'if the Spirit is enlightened by the humble and divine Christian Revelation.' "

At these words I shivered, I confess, taking them seriously. "I see what you are coming to," I said to myself! "Here rises, on the horizon, the Original Sin and the Valley of Tears. Consequences: in politics, monarchy and Priesthood; in social economy, Property in the present based on charity in the future, in History, the Bollandists; in Science, Joshua. If not, most dear brother, I confine you, I torture you, I kill you, I shall have etched on the stone by your partisans: *Ci-gît un martyr.*"

Thereupon I made, morally, a sudden turn on myself. I changed my principles, without any warning: that is to say that—without exactly leaving aside the idea of God—I proposed to myself to draw from

these certain atheistical propositions—so as to come to my own end—which was to disturb the game of cards to such a point that everyone of us would discuss and shout without knowing the reason why we did it.

"Permit me," I stammered, "to protest that there are, in your theories, certain tautologies. Here, dear hostess, we advance along a road we can't avoid: and why? That's the question. Now, to explain it. Several people have made Intuition intervene, in the fashion of Charlatans: that is to say, the Induction, unknown and beyond the reach of inspired Visionaries. But, to be on the height of a mountain, one has to climb one by one the degrees of which this elevation is simply the summit, and there is no spontaneous intuition in it. If Revelation were in any arbitrary fashion to enrich the Problem of a new-fangled complication —there would be no means of preventing it, except by means of a mere misunderstanding. I want to believe that a God has cre-

ated the world, but the means of admitting that he occupies Himself with it, so far as to 'reveal' to us his intentions through the intermediary of such and such—can one possibly prove it in any peremptory fashion? I'm astonished that a mind like yours should let itself be lulled by such chimeras: they have had their day."

I found it legitimate to savour the effect of my eloquence on my interlocutors, and my regard, wandering in the shadow, glided in the direction of Claire. She had not quitted her impenetrable attitude near the window and her silence began to disturb me. I felt myself observed by her penetrating and inquisitive eyeballs—her spectacles hid from me their infernal expression.

"Well, Claire," said Lenoir, "won't you answer?"

"Oh," said she with a curious smile, "you know that the arguments that have so far been enough to confound the dialectic of our friend are not absolute—and that I am

not anxious to be the instrument of his defeat."

I considered, and with a by no means dissimulated stupor, the woman who didn't even tremble in making more venomous my wound to this monstrous degree, but as for these damnable words, I found no means of answering them. I tried to invent a sanguinary epigram: all the efforts of my brain remained fruitless. And, when this wounding proof of my powerlessness had, to me, been fully demonstrated, spite, indignation, blind hatred began to invade me. My heart shook and seemed to sound the funeral knell in my breast: fury, thirst of vengeance, vague ideas of murder, all the vilest sentiments, rose one after the other fearfully in my throat, and reflected themselves suddenly in my face by a stupid smile of approbation. Yet, all the same, my gesture, my attitude encouraged her to continue.

"The fact is," I murmured, so as to keep myself in countenance, "that the affirmations

of Lenoir would make Monsieur de la Palice jealous if they did not make him blush."

"You have saddened me," said Claire in her grave and mystical voice, "when you declared just now that Science was enough to illuminate the Enigma of the World, and to walk by its borrowed light suffices a just man in his dealings with God."

Lenoir lowered his eyes with a sinister smile; I wanted to aid him if I could—as I know how to aid people.

"You repeat yourself so often, dear Lady," I stammered, "You are recriminating without solving the difficulty."

She replied. "I know men who ought not to accuse us of repeating ourselves, for the simple reason that they have never said anything at all." And turning towards Césaire, she went on: "When I think Light, my very humble mind coincides with *that* which causes all light to be produced. The Spirit into which every idea as well as

every essence is resolved penetrates and is penetrated, irreducible, homogeneous, one. And then I think the idea of God, when my mind reflects that idea, I really penetrate the essence of it in my thoughts; participate indeed in the very nature of God, according to the degree of the idea of Him which He reveals to me, being an ideal of all thoughts. And my mind, according to the abandonment of my thoughts to God, is penetrated by God, by the proportional increase of the *living idea* of God. The two terms, at my free good-will, are combined in that unity which is myself: and they are combined without ceasing to be distinct. Now, the Christian Revolution, being the consequence and the application of this absolute principle, it is not for me to treat it as 'a chimera which has had its time,' since it is of the nature of the principle from which it derives itself, that is to say, eternal, unchangeable, immutable."

"My dear Claire," I replied, "I believe

you have too immense an idea of God. He is not only infinite, but how necessary, but how inconceivable—but how astonishing! Why do you always want Him to enter into our conversation? Kant had an old man-servant called Lamb, who supplicated his master to reconstruct the proofs of the existence of *a* God, radically destroyed by the great philosopher. We have also, in all of us, one knows not what old man-servant who requires a God. Let us be more sensible than Kant: let us put aside the first movement of our thoughts. We must not accept any such gifts except those we consider beneficial. The heritage of our first parents, to tell the truth, seems to me to merit it beyond all expression."

She replied quietly: "Why not ask of the Infinite if God exists? Must he not realize all our thoughts? (For what would be an imaginary Infinite which would be limited to this impotence in realizing one of

Man's sensations?) And as God is the most sublime thought of which we can possibly conceive the intimate idea, we should be infinitely mad if we were to set ourselves to destroy it, in ourselves (which is besides impossible)."

"That might be," said Césaire, "But, my dear Claire, no one can ever thrust back the evidence of the development of man—and not take into account what is more serious. After all, Progress doesn't exclude Revelation; the initial chastisement remains all the same, in spite of the fact that thanks to our sweat, it diminishes in its intensity. Revelation never disturbs us. I see it everywhere. You are therefore very wise to confine yourself to it. Only, in metaphysics, I am obliged, on my part, to base myself on human Progress, *by Science.*"

"Ah!" cried she, "how could you imagine that you could not develop yourself, except through a series of relative expressions which are actually the bases of your

Science? In this case, instead of being perfect animals, we are simply animals who get better and better and that an indefinite Progress encloses forever in a proportional law. If even the thing were absolutely true, there would be no reason for us to pride ourselves on the fact; for, in a thousand years, with this system, we shall dig deeper and deeper, like the moles: what matter the grandeur, the splendour, and the depth of the hole if we know that this hole ought to be the burial-place of our Destiny? If we devoted ourselves to Death toward which we move always with more rapid steps—the skies, after the affirmations of positive Science, must become silent, sooner or later, burning or mortal. Hardly can we examine the past of six thousand years, our appearance on the earth hardly dates from more than a few hours—and for us remains the enormous task of building houses for ourselves on the shifting sands, when a mere nothing might make us, without remission,

return into the dust, into the darkness, into Annihilation."

"But," I cried, "the catastrophe of which you spoke will not take place except in so considerable a lapse of time that it is absurd to think of it. Let us wrench, first of all, from Nature herself, our independence: after that, the Deluge."

"But," said she, "we shall always be in dependence on Nature, for this reason simply that we are always obliged to think. One *must* believe in thought: to deny this would be a lie. And that is why we haven't an action, an idea, a reason, that is not based on our Faith. We believe in our senses, in our doubt, in our progress, in our annihilation, in spite of the fact that these might, rigorously speaking, be doubtful: since nothing proves nothing. The most profound Scepticism begins by an act of faith.

"Now, since choose we must, let us choose the best that's possible! And since Belief is

the only basis of all realities, let us prefer God. Science might try to explain to me in its own fashion the Cause of a certain phenomenon, and yet I must continue in not seeing, in this phenomenon anything except what might AUGMENT in me my veritable Soul, and not what might annul it. If the mystics are deluded, what is a Universe inferior even to their thoughts? In Death, is it logical for two abstractions to give back to me my utterly lost Divine-Infinite? No! I shall close my eyes on a world to which my imagination is a stranger. It matters little to me if the laws of the Mechanism of the Stars are discovered as they only tell me of a certain destruction. These stars that shall be extinguished—Temptations! This Science that has a future—Illusion! The History of modern times is the history of Humanity that enters its winter. The cycle shall soon have revolved on itself. So, as the wise lawyers of

old have given me the sacred example of their own lives, never shall I hesitate, I, a sinful woman and a Christian, between your century of lights and the Light of the Centuries."

CHAPTER XIII

THE SINGULAR REMARKS OF CÉSAIRE LENOIR

L'Ecclesiaste à dit: "Un chien vivent vaux mieux
Qu'un lion mort." Hormis, certes, manger et boire,
Tout n'est qu'ombre et fumée, et le monde est très
vieux,
Et le néant de vivre emplit la tombe noire.

—Leconte de Lisle.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SINGULAR REMARKS OF CÉSAIRE LENOIR

ON ACCOUNT OF THE FURY WHICH had stifled me during this denunciation, I began to play with the knot of my necktie, and, not knowing how to express, nor in what fashion, my pity for such doctrines, I contented myself with saying *Brava!* eight times over in a flute-like voice. One thing pleased me: Lenoir became silent and sombre. They had differed on certain points—so that their convictions seemed to me equally absurd. The essential thing was to excite their imaginations in order that I might sit in judgment over them and have the last word—(so that I could think of my own affairs under an air of profound attention, all the time they were fault-finding). I really hoped that

this couple—so model a couple they were—should start quarrelling furiously in regard to "the Immortality of the Soul," and that I might end by laughing at them. So I resolved to share Lenoir's opinion—whatever it might be; for his wife's theories had a way of exasperating my brain to such an extent that I simply hated her. Let the Reader imagine, if he can, what was my surprise (I might almost say my disappointment) when I heard Lenoir enunciate these strange words: "Claire's intelligence is a deep glass wherein only sublime truths are mirrored, and I am proud to love forever her admirable being."

At these words I turned and stared at Claire: she seemed to me to have turned livid. Césaire got up: he made one step towards his wife and, bowing suddenly, kissed her hand fervently, in silence, with a passion of which the savage fury—concentrated and convulsive—astonished me. Then he returned and seated himself on my right.

There passed some seconds during which I heard distinctly the sea's murmur: I tried in vain to gather together my scattered faculties.

"Yes, the Ideal," added Lenoir (who continued to turn head over heels against the principles he had defended), "Hope invincible! Faith! What is more positive, after all? Swedenborg said: 'Belief is as much above thought as thought is above instinct.' In effect, one must believe. And when I force myself to affirm the autocracy of some kind of philosophy—there are as many as there are individuals—and when I do my best to defend the hair-splittings of Science—so vain in its real results, so proud in its troubling appearances—I find, always, that I can repress in myself an immoderate desire of laughing. If one only knew up to what point the living force of the Idea is surprising and terrible in the realms of Faith! The flash of an imagination, of a dream, of a vision, often surpasses the actual

laws of life. Fear, for instance, the mere idea of superstitious Fear *without any exterior motive,* might destroy a man as it were by an electric shock. The things seen by a visionary are, in the depths of his vision, materials of so intense a reality that: imagine, if the Sun himself, this mysterious lamp of all this fantastic system of creation, were to disappear, to suffer transformation! Have you reflected on these monstrous human tigers spotted with discoloured blood —on these cephalopedes, these double-men, on the horrible faults of nature, finally, sprung from sensations, from a caprice, from an IDEA, during the woman's conception? Have you ever meditated over the childish explanations of Physiology on this subject? If I open medical annals, touching the almost ponderable reality of the Idea, I find, at any given instant, facts such as these: I quote the exact text: 'A woman, whose husband was killed by the stroke of a knife, gave birth, five months afterwards,

to a daughter who, at the age of six years, fell into fits of hallucination. And the child always cried: "Save me! Here are men armed with knives who are going to kill me!" This little girl died during one of these fits, and there were found on her body, black spots, like bad blood, which corresponded, on the breast, despite the sexual differences, with the wounds her father received seven years before, during which period she was still *en deça des mortels.*' Call that what you like: I want to know in what manner the shadow, the idea, differs decidedly from what you called *Sensible reality,* in what manner the simple reflection of a sensation, alien from the power of instillation, can spread itself mortally into the essence of our body? What! A shadow —which is no more than a shadow—might kill us in spite of all that? Let us reflect. Open the books of the Physiologists:— Bulard defines Life as the organism in action, and Death as the organism in repose.

The first word of Bichat is this: 'Life is the totality of the functions that resist Death!' Consult, after Harvey, the best treatises: re-read the famous researches of Broussais on blood, and you will find that so great a writer can cry: 'Without phosphorus, no thought!' Yet the greater part of them, mostly the modern ones—and these are not the most logical—don't admit the idea of Life, nor the idea of Death, nor the idea of the Organism. Now, having returned from the absolutely divergent and contestable principles of Physiology, bring to your mind simply this fact, that I have noted among a thousand, bring to your mind phenomena represented, for example, by the delirium of dying people. It is exactly then that visions begin to become *a little more real—!* What shall I say? because they are the only things that merit the name of Reality. Death is the Impersonal; it is the reality of that which is no more than vision. It is *certain* for me, that our actions shall become a sec-

ond body and that the Past shall reaffirm itself in Death in the form of the flesh.

"Thought is a Shadow, and we feel by instinct that Death is the realm of shadows. Death and Life are no more than rigorous consequences of the eternal dialectic; and, by this, even that they are necessities, constituting as it were the double face of Existence, they shall find, in effect, their essence in the Spirit. 'Thought being given, Death is given by this same essence!' said the Titan of the Human Spirit: 'and this alone can prove Immortality!' Suppress Thought, there will remain substances which might be certainly *eternal,* but which are certainly not *immortal;* for Death begins where Thought becomes extinct. Death, created by the Spirit as by Life, is absolved by the Spirit."

"And what we call Death, is not, in effect, more than the middle term, or, if you prefer it, the necessary negation, the Idea seizes on so as to develop itself until it reaches the

Spirit, across Thought. I might almost go so far as to say that we might have, even now, on this side of our Destiny, some terrifying lights which shine before us, and which our past reserves for us. Think of those millions of individuals who are drowned or hanged and who, at the last moment of suffocation or when they are in the act of dying, having been recalled to life, have affirmed that they have seen themselves on the point of passing through all their actions, through all their thoughts, the most forgotten of them, and that in a manner inexplicable! The real question isn't to know if the soul's immortal, since there's an evidence which neither proves nor disproves it. The question is to know *of what nature this immortality might be and if we could, here, have any inflence over it.*"

"Then," cried I, completely confounded by this overflow of incoherent and preposterous words, "do you really believe in a certain materiality of the soul?"

"I believe, at least," said Lenoir, "in spite of all vain dialectical sophisms, that, for example, the force of suggestions that a vindictive dead man might exercise—from *the utter depth of an unutterable Darkness*—on a living being who was familiar to him (to whom, in consequence, he was obscurely attached by a thousand invisible threads),—yes, I believe, certainly, that this force of suggestions might, on this being, become oppressive, murderous, formidable—finally, material—during an indefinite lapse of time. For there are the living dead! whose passions Death never absolutely abolishes."

I felt that he really ought to have put an end to these jests whose horror began to creep over me. "My friend," said I, "permit me to quote Voltaire, one of our finest wits: 'Quand celui qui parle ne se comprend plus, quand celui qui écoute n'est plus à la conversation, on appelle cela de la métaphysique.' "

Lenoir looked at me sternly. "That's

true," said Claire, as she came nearer, "but the same personage has said also, somewhere, in the story of the Phoenix: 'La Résurrection est une idée toute naturelle: il n'est pas plus ètonnant de naître deux fois *qu'une.*'"

"The Resurrection"—I said, "that was laughable only to Voltaire, because so subtle an intelligence was capable of infinite ironies and unimaginable paradoxes."

"That's true," said Claire, "only, if you put in question the persistence of one's personality in Death, I could show you that this is a useless expense of spirit. First of all I would like to know if it is not the same question even in Life? Or is the Ego really itself? When? At what hour of life? Your Ego of to-night, is it the same as it will be to-morrow? Or that of fifty years? No. We are the living puppets of a perpetual Illusion. And the Universe is really and absolutely—a dream!"

"An evil dream!" added Lenoir pen-

sively: "for—I can't repeat it without stupor —all I have learnt of philosophy hasn't modified the frenzied and frantic demon who is in me, and I'm afraid to become once and for all—in *some other system of visions* —that which I am."

"Oh!" he went on, "if only I had, as Claire has, the springboard of Faith on which to jump out of these dismal thoughts, of which I am the haggard prisoner. But —look at me: I am *too much* of this world: I do not know exactly—in a word—*where two and two might not make four.* And, yet!——"

CHAPTER XIV

THE SIDEREAL BODY

Words! Words! Words!
—SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet.*

CHAPTER XIV

THE SIDEREAL BODY

LENOIR ARTICULATED THESE WORDS ON a tone that froze, definitely, the smile on his lips: it seemed to me, suddenly, that during our conversation, Night herself had come nearer and nearer, ominous and sinister. The fact is that the simple night outside, where the cold breath of the wind lashed the waves to a point of fury, revealed, under heavy clouds, her starless horror. This change of impressions was so rapid that I was hallucinated. It seemed to me that we became more pallid than ever: the curtains of the window shook; we were under the influence of the Midnight.

I felt, at that instant, the hereditary evil

which is in me surge out of the depths of my nature, and not being able to endure the sight of that desolate space, I rose precipitately, and shut the window with the nervous apprehension of an evil presage which is in me the foretaste of the anguish of Hell! Ah! this malady—how did it seize on me? Isn't it awful not to know the cause of one's own malady? All the same, I dissimulated as much as I could the state of my sensations and I answered Lenoir indifferently. "Do you pretend to infer that you have in you another person than yourself, doctor? What the devil! That's most disquieting, isn't it, when you are in so reasonable a state of mind?"

"But you yourself, Bonhomet," replied Lenoir after a silence as he gazed at me with his shining pupils, "might you not say to me *if the exterior being, apparent, that you offer to us,* which is manifest to our senses, is really *that which you know to be in yourself?"*

This unexpected question perturbed me, and he went on: "This exterior being, alone perceptible and accessible, has it not in it always its spectator, its judge, its contradictor?"

"Yes," said I, "that's the theory of the ancients: *Homo duplex.* What exactly are you driving at?"

"That, Bonhomet, this interior companion, this occult Being, is the only *Real Being!* and that is this being which constitutes our own personality. The apparent body is no more than the *replica* of the other, yet it is a veil that thickens or lightens according to the degree of the translucid quality it possesses, and therein the occult being cannot be divined and recognized except by the expression of the lineaments of the mortal mask. The organism is no more than a pretext to the luminous body that penetrates it, and one doesn't ever dream of one's body—except, perhaps, to add more vitality to it—when one's alone. Notice

this: if two men are linked together by some sentiment, they finish by forgetting little by little the details of their aspect: they cease to *see themselves*: they are placed in a more profound relation with one another, and it is their moral being that they see conversely: they know who they are, under the palpable simulacra."

"That's specious," said I.

"And this is what gives the key of many mysterious contradictions," added Lenoir. "The apparent body is itself so unreal that, often enough, *it is not a man who inhabits the human form.*"

"O, O!" cried I, with a nervous crispation, for it seemed as if an alligator had jumped inside of me.

"What! Haven't you ever seen the type of an animal predominate—that of several animals—over a human face? Now, observe attentively the familiar movements, the instincts, the tendencies of the individual in whom the type of the beast predominates,

for example, of the tiger, and you will experience the obscure vision, in him, of I know not what wild beast. Do you believe there are many men and women, who have any idea of themselves, in our earthly Humanity? Man is no more than a divine animal, differentiated from the others by the Ideal. And the man in whom the desire for things eternal is not ceaselessly awake in the depth of his conscience, he who has something of the animal in him and who isn't wholly out of the darkness: he isn't *Man,* in reality, and his face's expression betrays him at every instant, despite his apparent form. In the same way the Woman who has her own idea of herself, if she who, reflecting sublime hopes, as in a deep and liquid mirror, lifts love and hope beyond Death. Can you imagine what multitudes of such beings are mixed in our different races? Let us be persuaded that cities are like forests—and that it is not difficult to find ferocious beasts there."

I interrupted him. "You believe that the majority of the living——"

"Are still linked in the interior chains of Instinct, are invisible beasts, transfigured by their transformation, if you like—only, they are *real beasts!* And the lineaments of their faces (in the expression of which appears the luminous essence of their veritable organism) prove it superabundantly. From thence their innate hate of Thought, their thirst, inextinguishable, organic, of lowering, of levelling, of profaning every noble and pure tendency; thence their grotesque scorn of all that is sublime in Art, of disinterested charity, of all that is not base and impure—as their preoccupations, their acts and their works, tend to prove. From thence their fashion of demonstrating the justice of their ideas with hits and with blood; from thence their impossibility of understanding the veritable man, the issue of the Most Holy! Yes, listen to me and believe me that the apparent body is not the

real one: it changes its atoms at every instant, it is renewed entirely at every revolution of six or seven months: it *is not,* properly speaking. *Ce n'est que du devenir dans le Devenir.* It is its form, its idea, its impalpable unity which is, and on which the Appearance rests. One of the *physical* proofs of this is that certain faces become more bestial or more illuminated at the approach of Death, in an astonishing manner, because there is, in the eyeballs, something to wonder at!"

"But it's the *Soul,* simply, of which you speak, and then—this would be *Homo triplex,* as far as one can imagine."

Lenoir shrugged his shoulders, then cried: "For my part, will you ever believe it? I feel in me the devouring instincts that are destroying me! I experience accesses of darknesses, of furious passions, a savage's hatreds, the ferocious thirst of unsatiated blood, as if I were haunted by a Cannibal! Yes, that's mad, but that's so: and I know

many doctors in asylums who might avow it themselves, if the money they gain didn't make them dissimulate. And, when I leave the realm of the Spirit, I distinguish, in myself absolutely, this infernal nature of mine! That's the truth of the matter! All the metaphysical speculations appear to me like filiations of glimmering nonsense, incapable not only of wrenching from me this horrible intellectual *form*—almost diabolical—but of giving me one single instant of certain hope. That's why I fear this vestiary that we name Death. That's why I'm always restless. No, I know myself much too well to know that I always shall be restless!"

The clock struck the hour of One. I rose up. I had more or less got over my nervous attack; Lenoir had really been much too excessive, much too extravagant. Decidedly I found more and more inept his superficial manias. "We will return to our conversation," said I.

"Yes," said he, preoccupied and a little

sombre, as he took from his pocket a small edition of the Bible and ended his peroration by crying: "We must occupy ourselves with this Bible." He tapped the cover as if he were tapping a snuff box. He opened the book mechanically, I might say at random, and lighted on the chapter of the laws of Moses consecrated to adultery and to its punishments. The passage once read, he blew his nose with a noise that alarmed me. There was a silence during which he examined me as if to judge of the effect produced on me by these sentences, and by their style.

The only thing I had noticed was that at the word "adultery" Claire shuddered, shuddered fearfully, as she sat in the shadow. This was perhaps only a nervous movement awakened by I know not what obscure sensation: perhaps of the night and by the sea's restlessness. The green thickets of Paphos must always have their mysteries, and the little malign god knows well enough

his own sinister reason for being there. As for Sir Henry Clifton, I had clean forgotten him.

Lenoir noisily closed his Bible and added, in a low voice as if he were speaking to himself: "In effect, how can we pardon adultery? O heart's rage! This idea intoxicates me, I confess! Yes, I feel that I must satiate my vengeance—and that the loss of Paradise will never arrest my steps—even in the regions of Death, if——"

The gaze he fixed on his wife seemed as if it would shatter itself to pieces on the green spectacles and on her pallid face. Claire rose and took up a lighted candle-stick. "You didn't think of this," said she, "our friend has need of rest."

Smiling, she handed me the candle-stick. A minute after, I fell asleep between the bedclothes, laughing until the warm tears poured from my eyes, at this fantastic couple.

CHAPTER XV

HAZARD PERMITS MY FRIEND INCONTINENTLY TO VERIFY HIS HUMILIATING THEORIES

"La Mort est femme—mariée au genre humain, et fidèle—Où est l'homme qu'elle á trompé?"

—Honoré de Balzac.

CHAPTER XV

HAZARD PERMITS MY FRIEND INCONTINENTLY TO VERIFY HIS HUMILIATING THEORIES

I PASS RAPIDLY OVER THE CHARMING and retired existence that the three of us led during more than a dozen days, after which my poor friend, lying lifeless in his room with the shroud over his face, reposed between two candles.

He had been carried away alas! suddenly, by an overwhelming stroke of apoplexy, caused by the immoderate abuse of the snuff he always inhaled. I had warned him many a time of the inconvenience, of the peril of this terrible herb—and of the risks he ran, in the deadly game he played with it. I failed dismally.

Disdainful of the remonstrances of his tender wife (as he supposed) who had many a time thrown herself at his feet, conjuring him, in the name of the most sacred sentiments, to abjure his foul passion, he never diminished the doses of the powder introduced at every instant, into his nasal cavity, gradually saturated with nicotine: The poison was not long in penetrating his powerful constitution; it perturbed him, it hurled him into horrible deliriums—and sometimes into furious follies.

Soon after my arrival, having discovered his mania, I resolved to save him; and, to diversify and amuse in him the demon of custom, I tried to substitute in his gold snuff-box, nitrate of silver, chloroborate of mercury, carbon, the sweepings of old shoes, caustic soda, gun-powder and a thousand other inoffensive drugs. In one word, I really had for him a mother's solicitude. All my efforts proved to be useless; he sniffed everything indifferently. All the

same I didn't want to be beaten; so decided to cure him by my own homeopathic system —the only serious one for those whose senses are not obliterated—I shut myself up in my chemical laboratory.

All that human ingenuity could invent in the way of furious sternutatories and terrible counter-irritants, I managed to glide into his snuff-box: he either had to succumb or to be healed. I had decided to make use of explosives, so as to put an end to his evil complaint. There was not one of the ingredients a man who is skilful as I was in regard to drugs and to other poisons, I did not make use of. I heated, at my life's peril, crucibles where I pulverized, after concoction, the essences of the most disastrous plants—even those that are deleterious—which are so useful in medicine when one weighs their doses. I seemed to see in all that the finger of God. I had for the moment neglected my dear infusoria: my friendship was my only guide—and often,

at night, when a nightmare awakened me, I perceived that my tiles were purpled by the reflection of the laboratory where bubbled, night and day, the alembics, the materials I used for my small glass tubes and my retorts, I had the delightful sensation that what was being done there, under the guardianship of the good genius of Science, would be deposited to-morrow in the olfactory apparatus of my deplorable friend.

At the moment when my treatment seemed to me to be singularly successful—(I remember how Lenoir used to gaze, from moment to moment, at his snuff-box with an indefinable expression)—on a certain Saturday night, about ten days after my arrival in his house—after one of our most delightful dinners—at the time of dessert, he suddenly turned pale, his eyes closed, he moved his lips—he was dead.

I had the presence of mind, during Claire's seizure, to put my ear over his

mouth, and I distinguished clearly enough the bizarre phrase I have quoted.

"In effect," murmured Lenoir, "how can one pardon adultery? I feel—at this moment—that I shall beyond all possible doubt incorporate the sentiment I have always had of myself,—yes, I feel that, from the depth of the utmost exterior darkness, I shall satiate my vengeance—if——"

These were his last words. One may imagine into what mourning, into what consternation we were plunged. How express it? I give it up. Besides, would it be fitting to admit the public into a private person's grief?

CHAPTER XVI

THAT WHICH IS CALLED A WARM ALARM

"Le cri du réprouvé ne traduit que cette pensée: Si j'avais su!—Et je le Savais!"

—Commentaires Sur La Théologie.

CHAPTER XVI

THAT WHICH IS CALLED A WARM ALARM

A! HA! I KNOW WHAT IT IS TO be a "Poet," when circumstances require it, when in one word that fits in with the solemnity of the event. Lyricism, when it has any reason for its existence, is by no means a useless thing: who might not absolve it? I might live on this peculiar kind of reputation, if I wanted to, since such crowds of creatures set themselves to make rhymes, and metres that scan: and, if I deigned to condescend to it, I might confide my ideas to the printing press.

I suppose I might have been taken—why not?—as a kind of "Poet"—if I had been born in the age when the pen procures fame and fortune. Really, I know quite a lot of

Primitives who—if this trade brought them neither money nor women—might stop exploiting, in their stupid jerks, particular persons and become just as absurd as I am. Still, the incident Lenoir was as you can imagine, of a nature to inspire me, if not with Epics, at least with very "poetical" solemnities of ideas and of phrases.

The dead man's room, on the third floor, was very large. On his face, as it lay there, wax-coloured and frozen, some drops of holy water, on which fell the light of the candles, shone like ghastly diamonds. Claire knelt against the bed, her head on the bed-clothes, her hands clasped above her forehead; I also knelt, some way off; in the obscure corner of the room, behind a toilet-table, seated on my heels, hands joined, head lowered, regarding always fixedly a red point on the carpet. We were alone. The priest and the doctor had retired an hour ago, talking in low voices. The door had been closed behind them. An immense

ivory crucifix, between the curtains, seemed to purify the darkness. I accused, with rage, pitiless nature who had deprived me of my friend and I would almost have doubted my own Science, if I had not made it part of my despair.

All of a sudden, I know not what had passed; only, to say the exact truth, I experienced a sensation of which the analysis —or even the distinct enunciation—seems to me situated far beyond the terms any human syntax can dispose of. A sensation of cold on the eyes and on the temples, simply.

At this exact minute, as I began to question myself as to what was the matter with me, the young widow rose up suddenly, her hair on end, the flame of the candles on the facets of her spectacles, her arms uplifted! Terrifyingly, she uttered, in the deep silence, a cry so impregnated and so saturated with a mad horror, that I felt myself invaded from head to foot, with fright—fright without any other qualification.

Fear—suddenly—inundated me: I can express it in no other fashion. I was frozen; she, seized with stupor, during an appreciable moment, suspended my faculties. All I did was to open and shut my eyes alternatively! Finally, I took heart to look on her sideways.

Her attitude was certainly not that which might have reassured me. In any case, the result of the glance I had given her was the instantaneous trembling, the instantaneous vanishing of my senses in one second. And I began, otherwise without moving, on my knees in that obscure corner, to utter—as wild beasts do at night—huge and slow and prolonged howls, chromatic like the scales in music, and whose volume augmented in proportion as they descended to the grave notes of a deep bass voice. At the third howl, I felt my sense of fear verge on delirium, and I assuaged my soul by a little laugh that was hardly distinct, which had the immediate effect of culminating Claire

Lenoir's horror, and to such an extent that she made one mad rush at the door, seized with panic, and fled down the staircase where, without one minute's delay, I followed her, taking four steps instead of one —without losing, as one says, one's time in idle commentaries.

We took just two seconds in leaping down landings and staircases until we reached the garden gate. In our simultaneous precipitation, as we tried to open this execrable gate, we neutralized our efforts; I uttered, in my deep distress, a stifled growl, the noise of which made me fall fainting into the poor woman's arms; our knees knocked together and we rolled half dead on the ground.

Then there were cries and the flash of lanterns, and steps heavy and slow; the terrified servants hurried in our direction. Claire Lenoir replied in her low voice to a question of the old valet. We were both taken to our separate rooms.—Not one hour had elapsed, than feeling suddenly surge

over me the self-possession I had lost, I jumped out of bed, I thrust anyhow all I had into my portmanteau, and I began to fly across the garden. I ran, in one breath, to the bureau of the diligences; I jumped into the first stage-coach I saw in this square, and I experienced an immense pleasure—at the first rattling of the wheels and at the sound of the postillions who sent the coach swirling to and fro by the noise of their whips. I knew I was going farther and farther away from the Lenoirs' house; promising to myself, in short, never again during the rest of my life, to set foot across that atrocious threshold.

Now, now! I can go back to my great discoveries. I live in the land I love. I can even say that I have made gigantic steps in the direction of Science.

But, the one thing of the utmost importance is—to conclude this Narrative. What I have to say is a thing so unutterably

terrible that I have been prolix by design. I dared not! I was postponing the fatal moment! But—I have drunk to-night, bottle after bottle of heady wines which have excited my imagination and I shall speak.

CHAPTER XVII

THE OTTYSOR

There are more things, in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

—SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet.*

CHAPTER XVII

THE OTTYSOR

A YEAR AFTER THAT, I FOUND MYself in the South of France. I had explored the chain of the Alps, I had stopped on my way to Paris at Digne; and there, requiring as usual, solitude, I secured a room in a hotel on the outskirts, where I only slept at night; my days were spent in the country; I took my instruments with me. One night, when I was very much perturbed, I returned at a late hour to the hotel, where I told the waiter to send up to my room some fish and cheese and pears and plenty of coffee for my night's rest.

The waiter had something solemn about him. "You see, sir, you forget that this is a feast day. With the exception of an old

sick woman who is in bed, there isn't a cat in the house, and no one in the kitchen. Most of the people here went to see the fireworks. You might find some restaurant if you felt inclined to follow that road which leads to the great city:—here's a letter for you."

I took the voluminous letter, and I read it by the candlelight. One of my London correspondents had sent it to me from England —quite an original man. He said at the end:

"An Englishman, a naval officer, one of my friends, perished in a most tragic fashion on a mission to extreme Oceania. The steamer on a cruise of exploration having reached 14° south latitude and 134° longitude, on a level with the Marquesas, with the sinister group of the Pomatu ahead, a boat was manned, commanded by the officer, to reconnoitre the landing-places—one of these little islands of a deserted appearance, where certain volcanic blocks of lava sprang

up, black, to prodigious heights—where balanced, in the storm sky of the great equinoctial ocean, enormous forests of immense green.

"In these regions, the most remote perhaps on our globe—no possible commerce having appeared to civilized nations to be worth the risk of sending ships into the midst of the innumerable reefs which rendered the shores threatening, these islets lost in the stretches of unmeasured bays remain altogether unknown: the archipelago contains more than seven hundred, of which only a few are coral-bearing.

"The fearful tempests, the slidings of a certain basaltic sand like the dust of anthracite, the descent of stagnant fogs, made these regions dangerous for navigators, who named these waters the Dangerous Sea; and so many ships of every rig were lost there that there had been a silent renunciation to wander in it. Only, one sect of Polynesian pirates, the Ottysors, spiers on shipwrecks,

hid themselves in the mountains during the evil nights, some concealed in the caverns, the others wandering across the rocks, watching for their prey.

"Now, at the moment of the event, the little detachments of investigators, under the evening shadows, skirted, under the cliffs of the island, the perilous sands, they regained the shore. The young officer, who had advanced fifty steps in front of the escort, was so suddenly assailed on going round a rock, by a huge black native (no doubt one of these Ottysor pirates)—that he had already severed the officer's head and, inundated with blood, balanced it at the end of his arm with fearful gestures, before any movement of defence, before any gun was fired and even before there was time to raise a cry. As the escort rushed forward to kill him, he was seen adventuring with slow steps over the deadly sands, in which direction was fired a continuous salvo, which lighted up the twilight, while all the time, the fantastic native,

devoting himself to death, let himself sink little by little into the fatal quicksands, where he disappeared, stifled, brandishing by the hair in his lifted wrist the bloody head he seemed to be gloriously exhibiting to the stars; our miserable friend was no other than Sir Henry Clifton, with whom you seemed to have travelled from Jersey to Saint Malo."

I refrained, for the moment, from reflecting on the fate of Clifton after I had finished reading this letter. I had heard of these jet-coloured Ottysors, *spiers on shipwrecks,* and that as a race they were nearly extinct. The sailors of Norway and Holland called these niggers the Demons of the Quicksands. These ferocious cannibals are enveloped in an impenetrable mystery. At night one often hears far off, on the shoals, their great cry, their sombre war-howls. These are veritable shadows. Not one of them has ever been made a prisoner, and no

one has seen them fall or fly. "One doesn't know what they do with their dead, or if they ever die," said, strangely enough, the Danish geographer, Bjorn Zachnussem.

I resolved to banish from my memory this adventure which might trouble my sleep.

"Didn't you speak to me of an old sick woman?" I said to the waiter as I put the letter in my pocket; "has she had supper?"

The waiter, who seemed avid to discover in my face the effect of the letter, made no answer. "No," said he, after a few moments, "her supper is there."

"Good," said I, "since she's ill, I'll eat her supper; there's no harm in that." And I began to laugh at this jest on the echoing staircase. I had certainly not arrived three quarters of the way up—apart from my irregular laughter—when my name, pronounced by an agonizing voice, came to me through the nearest door on the landing where I found myself.

I stopped short, feeling horribly ill at

ease. "Who is there?" I said to the servant.

"That?" said he, "is the old woman. It seems as if she ought to know you."

"What's this woman's name?"

"Madame Lenoir."

"Madame Lenoir?" said I to myself in a low voice, after the silence of an instant. "What, the charming and incomparable Claire? All the same, how could she have found herself here?" I asked myself.

The waiter put his tongue against his teeth and made a buzz of indifference. "I don't know," he said insolently.

The most gracious of my smiles accompanied this turn of phrase, and it was accompanied, in spite of myself, by a vigorous kick in the ribs of this young Mercury. The candlestick fell,—and, as the waiter, seized with a terror I sought in vain to explain to myself, endeavoured to renew on his part, on the staircase, the flight of Hippomenes and of Atalanta, I took up the candlestick and I struck discreetly with the bone of my

Saturnine thumb three strokes on the door. I held in the other hand my candlestick and my portmanteau.

"Come in," said a voice. I turned the handle and the strong smell of new paint was the first sensation which affected me the moment I entered the room. The walls, that had been repainted, were of a whitish blue, absolutely uniform and oily. No sooner had I seen them than there suddenly flashed into my mind the idea of those bits of metal that the successors of Daguerre use in their studios to augment the day's reflections. In the bed, covered with white curtains, a woman, with a face as yellow and drawn as parchment, dressed in black, was propped up on the pillows. An enormous pair of bluish spectacles covered her eyes. On the chimney were two or three bottles ticketed by the chemist. A candle smoked on the night table.

"I knew your voice, doctor!" the woman

in the bed said, without moving. "Sit down beside me: there is a certain thing I have to tell you. I nearly lost all traces of you since you were at Geneva, but this morning, soon after my arrival—And then I was certain to find you before I die."

Compassionately I approached this spectre. I really hesitated in recognizing Claire Lenoir, seeing the ravages caused in this face, evidently by some mysterious anguish: she seemed suddenly to have aged, to have aged fearfully. I insinuated these things to her as decently as I could. She began to gaze on me, behind her spectacles, in a profound silence.

"Yes," murmured Claire Lenoir, in an equable voice. "You are a horrid old man!" And she remained pensive.

For the first time in my life, I understood certain scenical effects in the Paris theatres where they act Comedies. I cast my eyes in all directions, not knowing to whom she had

spoken. As a matter of fact, we were alone.

I took her arm and tested the pulse: it was at the same time bounding and filiform; I had pity on her folly and I seated myself beside her bed.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ANNIVERSARY

Une coupable joie et des fêtes étranges,
Pleines de baisers infernaux,
Dont se réjouissaient l'essaim des mauvais anges,
Haqant dans les plis des rideaux.
—Charles Baudelaire: *Les Fleurs Du Mal.*

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ANNIVERSARY

"TELL ME, TELL ME, WHAT SIR HENRY Clifton confided to you?" asked Claire Lenoir, in a voice horribly low.

"Ah!" said I. "Nothing."

"You know what happened during a voyage of Lenoir: you know it!"

I put both my hands in the form of a cross and said: "I don't know one single word of it."

"I confess to you what I shall have to confess before God: all that was ignoble in my miserable misconduct; only, in one word, I was loved! I am guilty!"

"Infamous creature!" said I to myself: then, "What real harm was there in that?"

"I know that a fault such as mine can never be forgiven; but, since I committed that fault I remained faithful to Lenoir—even in thought—up to the time of his death."

"I am not a Priest."

"The Priest has just left me and I tell you I am going to die," said Claire in a preoccupied manner.

"O, how can it be? You exaggerate. Your colour isn't really bad, the voice doesn't exactly hiss, and, except in the case of an attack to which we are all exposed, you don't appear to be relatively at all unwell."

"What then is this, doctor?" said she as she lifted her spectacles.

"This?" said I after a rapid examination. "The devil! There are, in effect some symptoms of——"

"Of?" said she in a voice that made all my nerves tremble.

"The symptoms of a malady that it would

be absurd not to treat in time," I added. "That's nothing!" But I thought, all the same: "The thing's certain! It's too late!"

"Finish then," she cried, "do you suppose I'm afraid?"

She trembled; but rather, if I may say so, because of a certain nervous perishing away than because of the fear of an imminent death of which she was evidently conscious.

"So be it," said I (as she had said to me before;) "only listen: the apoplexy is a little disturbance of the brain: I see now that the veins of the eyelids, of the temples, even of the face, are congested in a most extraordinary manner: one might say they would snap in two." I got up and went across to see the labels on the bottles. "I am going to try and find what I can do," I said to her. I promised to myself that I would never return, for I realized too damnably that my help would be ineffectual.

"Useless! Stay here! Death's a thing for which I have prepared myself for years. I

know what my state is: in a few minutes, at ten o'clock, all will be over. Stay here with me, I tell you. Believe me, I am still in full possession of my reason. I said to you: I have something singular you must listen to."

What could she have meant in the way of singularity? Nothing, evidently. Besides, I didn't want to hear her.

"On my faith!" I cried, "I cannot help admiring you! Only the fact is that you are worse—ever so much worse—than you ever were. And, the fact is that, from one moment to another, you might be forced by Nature to leave me alone. Let damned fools go to the Devil! Speak now—speak quickly!—for your voice grows weaker."

"Oh! be silent! Do be silent!" said she, broken with fatigue. "Lean over so that I can speak to you." I obeyed with repugnance. *"Living!"* said she, "he has never known anything about that disastrous affair —never—never anything! Only understand this: I am certain that he *knows,* now.

This is the night of his anniversary! It is all but ten o'clock! Yes, yes! I'm certain he's going to seize me—seize me by the eyes!" she vociferated suddenly. "How can I resist him? My flesh was chained to his flesh—in a word said before the feet of God the Consecrator!"

Ah! A thing really bizarre! Mysteries of the organization! Despite the place, the hour and the memory, I had not winced. "That's delirium, nothing more!" I thought. Sad as the situation was, I showed but little sadness. I felt myself lively, active and nimble. What, in effect, had I to fear? Lenoir, at any rate, had the fortune—rather, the misfortune—of being dead.

"Don't be afraid, I'm here," I said to her, trying to quiet her. "I have not every day such unreasonable panics as that which put me to flight on the night of Lenoir's death, I admit that this nervous movement was,

as far as I was concerned, unpremeditated."

"Oh! Wretch! Say that this is the single and singularly unconscious light of Reason, of veritable Reason, that you have never had since the day of your birth!" said Claire, still leaning back; "say and always think that!"

She had a kind of diabolical gurgling; the blood obstructed her throat.

"Oh! the dismal breath of the reprobates!" said she. "You remember the room? Your eyes were lowered; you were kneeling; you saw nothing. As for me, I was prostrated, in my anguish, against the bed. I could see nothing. But I am going to tell you, now, what passed over our heads! Lenoir reopened his eyes. He suddenly thrust back the shroud, lifted himself up, in silence, wrists twisted and lifted upon me! He had the figure of damnation! He gnashed his teeth—and with no noise, for us. Ah! Ghastly, with two vent-holes of

Hell under his eyelids, he cursed me as if I were part and parcel of himself, in the name of the nights without God into which we shall enter. And we did not see him, because it *was necessary* that our heads were lowered at that moment!"

"Then he extended himself again, pulled back, with both his hands, the shroud over his breast, closed his eyes and his face assumed the insensible mask that we must all, when our last hour comes, assume: that I, myself, shall soon assume. It was then that, not knowing what had happened, I rose up and embraced him tenderly, tears in my eyes, on his dead forehead, for the last time."

She was silent; as I looked at her fixedly I said: "How did you know that all that really happened?"

"I saw the scene reproduce itself next night, in a dream, in a great glass into which I was looking."

"The demons might inhabit, in effect, the

reflection of glasses," I said compassionately, "but, in real life," I added as I considered her with my dull eyes, "in real life, one doesn't admit, like that, the Demons. How could you have been able to recognize me, in the reflection of this mirror? My features must have been dubious: this was rather, I suppose, due to the moral beauty, was it not, shown, as it were, in these features of mine, by which you thought you had recognized me? In a dream? But why did you utter that cry, in the room, seeing that you knew nothing, seeing that you had seen nothing?"

"No sooner had I risen," said Claire Lenoire, "no sooner had I embraced him, my ear still against his mouth, than I heard a harsh and horrible laughter—an abominable yelping that surged from his furious lips! Then, I cried, because I was vanquished by a terror that has no limits, a nameless and an undescribable horror! And my cry had so directly risen from the depths of my en-

trails, that you understood, electrically, its signification."

This, I really must confess, made me turn pale in my turn. The fact is that the lonely inn, the candles that threatened to extinguish themselves, this idea of the anniversary, and, above all, this dying woman, dressed in black and wearing spectacles, began to obliterate the rectitude of my judgment. The hereditary evil of which I have spoken invaded me again, little by little. I felt it groan inside of me. The thing, the thing, the thing! My teeth began to chatter, the sweat poured from my temples; I turned green, my eyes became injected and rolled in their orbits, an awful oppression weighed heavily on my chest: I threw away the mask. "Vision and folly!" I howled, haggard, as I rose on my feet.

CHAPTER XIX

TETERRIMA FACIES DAEMONUM

"Comme le prêtre se détourna vers le cadavre en lui disant la parole de l'Office des morts: Responde mihi! *l'on vit l'évêque dé funt se dresser dans su bière en criant d'une voix affreuse:* Comparii! Judicatus sum! Justo judicio Dei, damnatus! *Et il se réitindit dans le cercueil."*

—Histoire de Saint Bruno.

CHAPTER XIX

TETERRIMA FACIES DAEMONUM

"I HAVE SEEN HIM, I HAVE SEEN him again, always in a dream!" said Claire Lenoir in a hoarse voice, without precisely addressing herself to me. "Three months and a half, it might have been, after his death; only, a thing that comes to us with the hazard of dreams, is the form under which he appeared to me. It was himself—absolutely *himself!*" With that the sickly smile of mad women wandered over her lips like a fire-fly over a tomb. "You will pity my poor intelligence in regard to dreams," she went on; "he was absolutely similar in body, in stature and in colour, *with these obscure beings who are mentioned in the narrative of the travellers in Oceania.*"

The idea of the letter returned to me; I made a nervous jerk, not believing one word she had said, I tried in vain to link together two ideas: a flash the nature of which it is not in the power of logic to explain, blinded my understanding. I felt a cry of horror stifled hideously in my throat.

"Yes," went on the dying woman with the solemnity of another world; "he was exactly like one of those familiar monsters of the lonely shores and the evil waves. His body, hairy and wild, rose up, smoked deeper than ebony. Sea-birds' feathers served him for clothes and girdle. Around him I saw spaces, indefinite, inhabited by the Terrors and by the infinity of dreams. Serpent of fire tattooed the apparition: his hair, long and grey, fell, bristling, around his shoulders. O! by what series of thoughts, by what ancient impressions, could it have come to me to figure him, to *dream* of him—so formless, so different! He stood upright, alone, among the lost rocks, gazing

far off, on the sea, as if he expected someone; with his impenetrable air, I *felt* that it was the dead man rather than the one I did not recognize. He sharpened furtively, behind him, a huge stone cutlass; his nocturnal eyes made my soul shiver, with an anguish of blood, of hell and of agony; I woke up shuddering, crying aloud, moist and damp with sweat. Never have I succeeded in forgetting this dream."

She became silent. Can I ever say, are there words which can ever express the fearful thoughts—daughters of funereal possibilities, after all—which shook me from head to foot, while she uttered these infernal phrases? I was—literally—overwhelmed, as if a nameless horror had seized hold of me.

Yet, in spite of the fact that the sound of my own voice made me shiver fearfully, I articulated without being certain of what I was saying: "No one! No one, fortunately—don't you understand?—can ever

determine the exact point where the objective reality of visions begins!" And I added with a forced laugh that made me ill in the mere effort of doing it: "The hospitals of mad people haven't ever thought of it! Do you remember the discussion we had during the life-time of this hair-splitter who was Lenoir?"

"Think so if you like," said the sick woman with a sad smile—"and pray. Prayers, flung by the will beyond Nature, escape Destruction. As for me, who have never blushed for shame, who have never felt the sense of shame in the act of prayer, when my fearful husband uttered his outrageous doubt—plague of our miserable days—so far as to feign respect for my faith by love of my guilty body—for me whose one desire was to repent of having committed the forbidden thing—for there is no reason that could absolve it—I hope and I am sure—that, after an instant of agony, God will not exclude me from His pardon."

Then, seizing with both hands her spectacles, she tore them off; the glasses broke between her blood-stained hands, she wrenched their frame in one hideous convulsion. She cried: "I shall never have any more need of these spectacles to see by!"

She spoke in a trembling voice, but all the same with the smile of an almost infinite hope in which her courage seemed to affirm itself for some terrifying experience, supreme and imminent, after which her soul would be "saved."

Ten o'clock sounded. There was a moment of silence, during which Claire Lenoir lay lamentably on her back, having thrown backward the black mantle that had covered her, her head propped high on the pillow, her eyes fixed and wide open. She seemed to be considering, to be *deepening, little by little,* despite herself, the blinding whiteness of the wall on which the reflection of the candles fell.

At this moment we heard the horrible

noises of the fireworks blown by the wind: the national feast was in full swing.

"Ah!" cried she with a nervous start, "what was it that I said? THERE HE IS! See, see! There, there! The monster of my evil dreams! There he is—just as he dreamed himself, he, Césaire Lenoir! Was he a *son of chen* for having been, thus, realized in Death? For whom did he sharpen—so slowly and so savagely—before the fearful sea—this knife? Ah! Vampire! Demon! Assassin!" gasped, in her death-rattle, the miserable woman, "Take thyself off from this wall! Leave my poor eyes alone!"

Her hands suddenly stiffened themselves in an atrocious spasm and her mysterious eyes grew greater: that which she saw became, to an absolute certainty, so abominable that she did not find in her throat the force for a cry. She fought with herself, then fell backward, rigid, always with her eyes fixed on the wall, with a kind of evil

sob. She had, I supposed, given up her soul: but of this I wasn't certain.

I went hastily to my bag to take out from it my case of lancets; I fumbled about desperately: I had only tube instruments, collections of infusoria, magnifying glasses: I rushed to and fro, across the room, as if I had lost my reason. I turned again towards the bed, holding mechanically in one hand a strong magnifying glass I had found.

Then, I seized the candle, I brought it close to the dead woman's face, and I considered her through the magnifying-glass, with a nervous shiver. "Finally—that's finished!" I said to myself with a sigh of relief: certainly, she was dead.

All at once, *I can never say why,* her stagnant eyes attracted my attention. An idea, one of the most unimaginable, passed, suddenly, through my mind. An evil curiosity entered into my heart and swept away all signs of apprehension. I stiffened myself, in spite of the awful shudder that crept over

all my limbs: I wanted to examine the speck that covered those tenebrous eye-balls and to plunge under this veil! A Demon seized my arm, bent over my old head, pressed on my eye, and almost with force, the powerful magnifying-glass and indicating to me, in the soul, the eyes of the dead woman, vociferated in my ear as he deepened my anguish: "Look!"

From that moment, I became quieter; I felt my science returning to me. I moved my magnifying-glass to and fro over her eyeballs. The eyes presented really no appreciable peculiarity, if it were not for their extraordinarily vitreous aspect. I was about to renounce my tentative idea when the pupils appeared to me to contain points which resembled punctures of shadows.

I went to the door and turned the key in the lock; then I returned to the bed, and crossing my arms, began to wonder what I had to do, what were the best means of experimenting. I had an induction apparatus

in one of my vest pockets. Suppose I were to make the ciliary nerve play up? I rejected this thought, as it was useless. Instead of this I drew out of my bag a little phial. "One drop of this alkaloid," I thought, "might distend the pupils." This idea I rejected: the solution in question could not be applied with any result on a dead body.

Suddenly I perceived my opthalmoscope. "There," cried I, "is what I want!" So I took, between my arms, the dead body, whose long night-gown formed a winding-sheet, and I propped it upright against the wall, underneath a big nail. I was going to fasten it by a cord passed under the arm-pits to this nail by the end knotted together. One reflection prevented me from doing it. That which might have remained in these eyes would have appeared to me in the inverted sense, turned upside down, the cavity situated behind the iris forming a black chamber. There was only one means of ob-

viating that. I hesitated in making use of it. I experienced a certain scruple in propping up against the wall, the head downwards and the feet upwards, the dead body of Claire Lenoir. One might have said to me, I am aware, that at the moment of so serious an experience, one has to prove oneself capable of a very tempestuous sentimentality, since no one ignores that this scientific formality—besides many others that are still more familiar—is practised, every day and at every hour in Europe, on at least fifty or sixty thousand corpses of women—belonging, of necessity, to the needy classes — in the amphitheatres, morgues and hospitals. To this I would reply that it was precisely because I had always known Claire Lenoir, that this seemed to me of the nature of a sacrilege.

Ah! If the dear lady had ever been to my knowledge, let me say, simply a poor or a needy woman—Good God! even a working woman—it goes without saying that I never

would have thought of hesitating—and that, if this preposterous scruple had even for an instant crossed my mind, I would certainly have stifled it, without any sense of shame, so as not to excite the laughter of my colleagues.

But, let me say it for the last time, I had always known that Claire Lenoir was an honourable heiress, and that, I confess, imposed on me a certain respect, even for her mortal remains. I therefore seized the body at arm's length and began to wander in the room, not knowing what on earth to do with it, when a solution occurred to me—and so simple that I was really astonished that it hadn't flashed on me before.

This is it: I replaced, and with infinite precautions, the body of Claire Lenoir on her death-bed; but I put it crossway—so that the neck and the head, falling over the edge of the bed, were seemingly suspended over the floor.

Her long chestnut hair, already silvered,

hung down. The face was seen upside down, and the eyes fully open, at the height of my knees, seemed to me, in spite of myself, to possess an almost disquieting solemnity. There is no question that—if there had *been something in their pupils*—that whatever it was, would have appeared to me in the normal sense.

I seized one of the candlesticks whose last flames flickered in the wick, and I placed it between us. I adjusted an enormous lens to the holder in front of the reflector and I prepared to direct the ray of light into the depth of Claire Lenoir's eyes. But, at the first glance I ventured to direct on these eyes through the hole of the ophalmoscope, I recoiled, not knowing—not wanting to know—what I had literally seen. I remained, for an instant, motionless: as for the ideas that appeared in my brain, I don't believe that Hell itself has ever reflected a more harrowing horror.

And, making me tremble, the window

panes were purple-coloured by the fireworks of the *Fête nationale,* bursting out over the exultant City, to the acclamations of a bisexual multitude. And, as the candlelight was still flickering, I knew I should soon be in the darkness.

"No!" cried I to myself as I bent my knees: "I must see, I must see!" And I directed my eye on to the luminous opening. It seemed to me that, alone among the living, I was to be the first to endure the Vision of the Infinite *through the hole of the lock.*

CHAPTER XX

THE KING OF TERRORS

"L'abîme à jété son cri; La profondeur à levé ses deux mains."

—Habacuc: *iii. IO.*

CHAPTER XX

THE KING OF TERRORS

HEN—OH! TERROR OF MY LIFE! OH Vision which has changed for me the world into one huge grave, which has hurled Folly into my Soul! In examining the eyes of the dead woman, I saw, distinctly, at first detach itself, as a frame, the stripe of violet paper that encircled the top of the wall. And, in this frame, reverberated in this fashion, I perceived a picture which no language, dead or alive (I don't hesitate one instant in saying it!) could, under the sun and under the moon, express in its unimaginable horror.

Oh, how can I describe it! What imagination could ever hurl into existence the mocking insanity of the words I am in the act of writing!

The paroxysm of the ardent disquietude which agitated me made the ophthalmoscope tremble between my fingers—and the

jet of light danced in the eyes of the dead woman, in her great eyes, revulsed, vitreous, fixed, exorbitant.

And this is more or less what I saw.

I saw the skies, the far-off floods, a great rock, the night and the stars! And upright, on the rock, huger in height than the living, a man, like one of the natives of the Dangerous Sea, stood. Was he a man, this ghost? He lifted with one hand, towards the abyss, a bloody head, with dripping hair. With such a howl as I have never heard, but the horror of which I divined in the ignivomous distention of the hugely opened mouth, he seemed to devote himself to the destructiveness of shadow and of space. In his other hand that hung, he held a stone cutlass, disgusting and red. Around him, the horizon seemed to me endless—the solitude for ever accursed! And, under the expression of a supernatural fury, under the spasm of vengeance, of solemn wrath and of hate, I recognized, instantly, on the face of the Ottysor-Vampire, his *inexpressible resemblance*

to Césaire Lenoir before his death and, in the severed head, the features, frightfully obscured, of the young man I had known, Sir Henry Clifton, the lost lieutenant.

Stumbling, arms extended, shivering like a child, I recoiled.

My reason fled from me: hideous, confused conjectures maddened and stupefied me. I was no more than a living chaos of anguish, a human rag, a brain as withered as chalk, pulverised under the immense menace! And Science, the old queen-sovereign with clear eyes, with perhaps too disinterested a logic, with her infamous embrace, sneered in my ear that she was not, she also, more than a lure of the Unknown that spies on us and waits for us—inexorable, implacable!

Suddenly, I precipitated myself in the direction of the wall and, pressing on it, flatly, my hands,—on which a nameless fright hugely separated my fingers—I knocked on the masonry.

"But—but—" I groaned as I regarded

sideways the dead woman—"It must have been that in scorn of the ancient lies of Space and Time—lies of which the evidence is inevitable—it must have been that the APPARITION was really exterior, to such an imponderable degree, *perhaps in a living medium,* in order to be thus refracted on your staring eye-balls!"

No sooner had I uttered these words than, hair on end, and wrists twisted, I shouted: "But—where—where, in hell or in heaven's name, are we?"

And, as I leaned over the dead body—with the frantic rage of a maniac who commits a sacrilege—so as to finally examine the execrable spectacle which fascinated me, the ophthalmoscope escaped from my hands at the aspect of the features of the dead woman; I had just seen two tears fall slowly, heavily, on her livid cheeks.

And Death began to gather her deep shadows, veiling the Impenetrable, over THOSE EYES. July 17th, 1920.

THE END

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